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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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The Challenges of Retaking Northern Mali

By Martin van Vliet



Military leaders from ECOWAS develop plans to regain control of northern Mali. - Habibou Kouyate/AFP/Getty Images

ONCE CONSIDERED AFRICA'S flagship of democracy, Mali has turned into a shipwreck of anarchy seemingly overnight. A military coup ousted Malian President Amadou Toumani Touré in March 2012, and within weeks state authority completely withered in the northern regions of Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal. Covering an area as large as the state of Texas, these regions are currently controlled by three "hybrid organizations" blending Islamic radicalism with transnational crime. Deeply concerned by the security threats posed by such a sizeable sanctuary for terrorists, the international community has pressured the Malian government and military to overcome internal wrangles as preparations for an international military intervention are underway.

Restoring state authority and legitimacy to northern Mali will require a radical break with the governance and security strategies adopted by Malian political elites during previous decades. The Malian state has recurrently relied on local militias in response to security threats in the northern regions, thereby fueling rivalry between and within local communities. Falling back on such a "militiary"¹ strategy in the context of the current crisis will be counterproductive to the efforts undertaken to restore state authority and legitimacy and could provoke a civil war.

¹ By deploying a "militiary" strategy, a state partly outsources its primary mandate of security provision to local militias. While often temporarily integrated into the military chain of command, these armed non-state actors mostly operate outside formal state structures.

This article will show why northern Mali is prone to rebellion. It will then explain how the state has supported militias to quell these frequent uprisings, argue that the state might reemploy that same strategy to unseat Islamist militants in the north, and identify what results an international military intervention might bring.

In the Margins of Development

Situated in one of the poorest countries in the world, development prospects in Mali's desolate and desert-like northern regions are particularly restrained. Most of Mali's economic and agricultural resources are confined to its southern regions. In the north, soil fertility is extremely poor, rains are sporadic and irregular, access to water is restricted and severe droughts occur frequently. Agricultural GDP per capita is inferior to any other region on the continent, while infant mortality rates are high. Covering almost 70% of the national territory, the northern regions only host a mere 10% of the population. Government investment and international aid have therefore long been primarily oriented toward the south.² Northern pastoralist communities were particularly marginalized by state policies adopted under the socialist regime of 1960-1968, as well as under the military rulers from 1968-1991 that strongly favored sedentary constituencies.³

Development prospects in the region improved from the mid-1990s as a result of increased government spending (particularly in infrastructure) but also due to the resources made available by actors and transnational networks operating beyond the state. Tourism flourished, international non-governmental organizations, religious

networks, multinational corporations and migrants all invested considerably in the area, the information and communication technology revolution facilitated enhanced connections with the outside world, and transnational smuggling further developed as a pivotal economic pillar in the region.

Rebellion and the "Militiary"

Just as the Malian state relied on non-state actors to deliver services and invest in northern Mali, it has also depended on others to perform its core function of security provision. Far from obtaining a monopoly on violence, the state repeatedly adopted a "militiary" strategy to respond to the series of armed rebellions that occurred in northern Mali during the last half century.⁴

The first violent conflict erupted when a small group of Tuareg leaders took up arms to rebel against their forced inclusion in the Malian state shortly after the country gained independence in 1960.⁵ The Malian army brutally crushed the revolt and kept the northeastern region under strict military control for decades.

A second Tuareg rebellion emerged at the start of the 1990s. Tuareg society consists of multiple clans (confederations) and is stratified along strict hierarchical lines whereby "subordinate" groups have increasingly contested "dominant" castes. The renewed rebellion soon fragmented along these tribal and caste lines, with different militant Tuareg groups fighting each other. The conflict gradually evolved into a small-scale civil war involving other—notably Arab⁶ and

Songhai⁷—communities. Frustrated by the army's poor response to the Tuareg revolt, senior Songhai officers deserted from the army and created the Ganda Koy militia to defend the interests of the sedentary Songhai population.⁸ Particularly violent confrontations took place between the Ganda Koy, the predominantly Arab Islamic Front of Azawad (FIAA) and the Tuareg Popular Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (FPLA).

Political elites in Bamako exploited these intra- and inter-communal tensions. The army actively cooperated with the Ganda Koy to combat the Tuareg and Arabic resistance groups. By adopting a "militiary" strategy, the Malian state deliberately ensconced rivalry and mistrust between local communities in the north. It was mainly due to the conciliation efforts undertaken by local traditional and religious authorities, supported by the international community, that a fragile peace emerged by 1996. Almost 1,500 Tuareg rebels were subsequently integrated into the army which, to the anger of other local communities, made former rebels responsible for maintaining security in the north.⁹

Transnational Crime, the "Militiary" and State Collapse

Situated on the margins of formal state development opportunities, northern Mali gradually took center stage within various transnational smuggling networks. Subsidized consumer goods

region). They formed the backbone of the militant Arab Islamic Front of Azawad (FIAA).

⁷ The Songhai, originally sedentary farmers, constitute the majority population in the Gao and Timbuktu region. During the last decades, they have seen many Tuareg settling in these regions, especially following the devastating droughts in the 1970s and 1980s.

⁸ The Ganda Koy also attracted support from former Tuareg and Fulani slaves, who joined out of frustration with the armed revolt of their former masters. Fulani (also known as Fulbe or Peul) are nomadic pastoralists scattered around the entire region. While the distinction between nomadic pastoralists and sedentary farmers is still often used, most livelihood strategies in northern Mali actually consist of combined forms of agro-pastoralism. See Lecocq, *Disputed Desert: Decolonisation, Competing Nationalisms and Tuareg Rebellions in Northern Mali*.

⁹ Baz Lecocq and Paul Schrijver, "The War on Terror in a Haze of Dust: Potholes and Pitfalls on the Saharan Front," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 25:1 (2007): pp. 141-166.

² David Gutelius, "Islam in Northern Mali and the War on Terror," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 25:1 (2007): pp. 59-76. Comparative research conducted by the World Bank suggests that countries with a substantial level of socioeconomic inequality that is either regionally or ethnically concentrated face a considerable, latent, security risk. See "Understanding Civil War. Evidence and Analysis: Africa," World Bank, 2005.

³ Tor A. Benjaminsen, "Does Supply-Induced Scarcity Drive Violent Conflicts in the African Sahel? The Case of the Tuareg Rebellion in Northern Mali," *Journal of Peace Research* 45:6 (2008): pp. 819-836; Pierre Boilley, *Les Touaregs Kel Adagh. Dépendances et Révoltes: du Soudan Français au Mali contemporain* (Paris: Karthala, 1999), pp. 285-286.

⁴ Previous armed conflicts in northern Mali occurred in 1963, 1990-1996, 2006 and 2008.

⁵ The Tuareg are nomadic pastoralists, culturally and linguistically related to North African Berbers, scattered across various Sahelian states. They strongly opposed becoming a minority within a predominantly "black" African country. In his book *Disputed Desert: Decolonisation, Competing Nationalisms and Tuareg Rebellions in Northern Mali*, historian Baz Lecocq depicted the racial stereotypes that underpinned relations between Mali's independence leaders and Tuareg representatives. See Baz Lecocq, *Disputed Desert: Decolonisation, Competing Nationalisms and Tuareg Rebellions in Northern Mali* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2010).

⁶ The principal Arab (Moors) groups residing in northern Mali are the Kunta and Telemsi (concentrated in the Gao region) and Berabiche (of which a majority reside in Timbuktu, but who are scattered around the entire

from both Libya and Algeria have long been popular contraband sold in northern Mali, while transnational cigarette smuggling networks rose to prominence in the 1980s. Demand for small-arms in the wider region prone to conflict particularly increased throughout the 1990s.¹⁰ During the course of the last decade, transnational drug networks started to benefit from this well developed “social infrastructure” underpinning the smuggling economy in northern Mali.¹¹ Conflicts between competing smuggling networks proliferated concordantly, fueling both intra- and inter-community tensions.¹² Traffickers established private militias to protect their business interests.

By 2006, internal rivalries within Tuareg society instigated yet another armed revolt. Leaders of the previous rebellions had witnessed what they considered their subordinates obtaining leading positions within the Malian army. Fearing a significant loss of influence, they decided to take up arms again.¹³ In response to this security threat, Touré fell back on the “militiary” strategy; he proactively supported the mobilization of “subordinate” Tuareg to fight the rebels but also leaned on private Arab militias established by drug smugglers

in both Gao and Timbuktu.¹⁴ Malian army representatives commanded these militias on various occasions.¹⁵

Touré’s balancing act in the north became increasingly complicated as the southern wing of al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)—which, until 2007, was known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC)—gradually anchored

“Diplomatic efforts to separate Ansar Eddine from both AQIM and MUJAO have generated initial results. A military intervention is then likely to primarily target AQIM and MUJAO and focus on liberating the cities of Gao and Timbuktu.”

itself within the region. Despite substantial international support, Touré frequently emphasized that the Malian army lacked the capacity to confront this rather small group¹⁶ and persistently called for a concerted regional response.¹⁷ Yet internal political motives also seemed to play a significant role for his non-

14 The short-term advantages of deploying local (Arab and Tuareg) militias, well adapted to the inhospitable northern terrain, enabled the Malian state to effectively counter revived Tuareg rebellions. Yet it also legitimized the drug smugglers behind these militias, raised considerable frustration within the army, deliberately ensclosed intra- and inter-community tensions and thereby undermined longer term stability. Also see Lacher, “Mali: Avoiding Escalation,” International Crisis Group, July 18, 2012.

15 Ibid.

16 Until 2010, most analysts estimated the number of AQIM members to range between 500 and 1,000.

17 Since 2002, the United States has supported the Malian government together with Niger, Mauritania and Chad to combat terrorism under the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI). Three years later, the program was reformulated as the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCTI) and expanded in volume as well as in partnering countries. A joint military base was established by Algeria, Mauritania, Niger and Mali, although mutual cooperation remained limited in practice.

confrontational attitude. AQIM had solidified ties with influential local Arabs in the Timbuktu region, people on whom Touré heavily relied for his “militiary” strategy to confront the Tuareg threat.¹⁸ International diplomats increasingly complained that the Malian regime colluded with (rather than merely tolerated) AQIM.¹⁹ Despite its international reputation as a flagship of democracy, the Touré regime relied on what the International Crisis Group has referred to as “remote-control governance through dubious criminal and mafia intermediaries” in the northern regions.²⁰ State representatives became deeply involved in the drug trade and kidnapping industry established by AQIM.²¹ As a result, the state lost much authority and legitimacy in northern Mali.

This delicate power balance altered decisively when well-armed Tuareg fighters from Libya returned to northern Mali following the fall of Mu`ammar Qadhafi. Yet preparations for a renewed rebellion had been ongoing since October 2011 and various leaders actively sought support from their kinsmen in Libya.²² While some returning Tuareg fighters decided to join the Malian army or refrained from fighting altogether, many joined the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), a recently formed Tuareg rebel movement.²³ These

18 Roland Marchal, “Is a Military Intervention in Mali Unavoidable?” Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, October 2012.

19 “Mali: Avoiding Escalation”; “La colère en intégralité d’un ambassadeur atypique,” *Le Républicain*, December 13, 2011.

20 “Mali: Avoiding Escalation.”

21 AQIM took more than 50 people hostage between 2003 and 2011, which secured a flow of income in the millions of dollars. See Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou, “The Many Faces of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb,” Geneva Centre for Security Policy, May 2011; Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Algerian Challenge or Global Threat?* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009).

22 Anouar Boukhars, *The Paranoid Neighbor: Algeria and the Conflict in Mali* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012); Andy Morgan, “The Causes of the Uprising in Northern Mali,” ThinkAfrica-Press, February 6, 2012.

23 A diplomatic source indicated that at least 2,000 men had returned by October 2011, but stated that the number could well be above 4,000. See Martin van Vliet, “Mali,” in *Africa Yearbook: Politics, Economy and Society South of the Sahara*, vol 8 (Leiden, Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill

10 Kalilou Sidibe, “Criminal Networks and Conflict-Resolution Mechanisms in Northern Mali,” *IDS Bulletin* 43:4 (2012): pp. 74-88; Wolfram Lacher, *Organized Crime and Conflict in the Sahel-Sahara Region* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012).

11 “Cocaine Trafficking in West Africa: The Threat to Stability and Development,” United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2007; Joelle Burbank, “Trans-Saharan Trafficking,” Center for the Study of Threat Convergence, September 2010; Stephen Ellis, “West Africa’s International Drug Trade,” *African Affairs* 108:431 (2009): pp. 171-196; “Cocaine: A European Union Perspective in the Global Context,” European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction & Europol, April 2010.

12 A smuggling coalition between Kunta Arabs and Ifoghas Tuareg clashed with Imghad Tuareg smugglers, Arab (Berabiche) traders in Timbuktu and Sahrawi smugglers. Furthermore, “subordinate” Arab castes transferred drug money into campaign funds to increase their influence in the 2009 local elections, which further aggravated intra-community tensions. For details, see personal interviews, Malian members of parliament, Bamako, Mali, December 2009. These details also exist in the U.S. Embassy cables published by Wikileaks.

13 Lecocq, *Disputed Desert: Decolonisation, Competing Nationalisms and Tuareg Rebellions in Northern Mali*, pp. 391-394.

well-armed rebels, joined by militants from Ansar Eddine, launched a new offensive by the end of January 2012, which the Malian army was unable to repel. The military coup that overthrew the highly unpopular Touré in March removed the final remnants of state authority in the north.²⁴

Northern Mali is currently controlled by an uncertain and opaque alliance established among AQIM, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO)²⁵ and Ansar Eddine²⁶ who have introduced and vigorously applied Shari`a law. Private militias established by smugglers have either realigned themselves to these new authorities or kept a certain distance, while former government-allied Tuareg and Arab militias moved across the border into Niger and Mauritania, respectively.²⁷

At the frontline between Mali's northern and southern regions, several local militias eagerly await being deployed by the Malian army. The Ganda Koy militia, a strategic government ally in the 1990s, has revived itself, and the Ganda Izo, which was established by other Songhai and Fulani in response to the renewed Tuareg rebellion in 2006, stand ready. Confrontations between the latter and a Tuareg militia have already taken place. The two militias teamed up with smaller northern self-defense groups under the Patriotic Resistance Forces (PRF), which is primarily opposed to ethnic Tuareg

and Arab communities.²⁸ A leader of the Ganda Izo recently told a journalist, "We are not going to let the Arabs and Tuareg enslave us again."²⁹ A Ganda Koy member indicated he was "ready to beat the 'light-skins,'" referring to the Tuareg.³⁰ It is clearly within a context of revived ethnic and racial rivalry that a potential international military intervention will operate in northern Mali.

International Intervention

By the end of November 2012, the UN Security Council will consider specified plans for an international military intervention in northern Mali as recently adopted by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and approved by the African Union. These include the training of Malian armed forces and the deployment of 3,300 soldiers, mostly from ECOWAS members and possibly other African countries. In the meantime, diplomatic efforts to separate Ansar Eddine from both AQIM and MUJAO have generated initial results.³¹ A military intervention is then likely to primarily target AQIM and MUJAO and focus on liberating the cities of Gao and Timbuktu.

Such an intervention would require strong Malian leadership. Yet different power factions still compete with and obstruct each other within the

interim government, and factionalism continues in the military.³² Also, while the deployment of government-aligned Tuareg and Arab militias, as well as the Ganda Izo, Ganda Koy and smaller northern militias, is probably useful to achieving short-term military objectives, it would certainly inflame (intra)-ethnic tensions. Falling back again on a "militiary" strategy will significantly frustrate future political processes that remain at the very core of any sustainable solution in northern Mali. If the Salafists are indeed ousted from the principal urban areas, they are likely to disperse within the vast desert to which they have become well acquainted over the last decade. Profiting from support networks in Algeria, Mauritania and Niger, where AQIM has conducted numerous attacks and abductions in recent years, neighboring countries will be directly affected. It is difficult to see an ECOWAS force, largely unaccustomed to the terrain, defeat the militants in these circumstances.

While increasing military pressure to counter the significant security threats in northern Mali has become unavoidable, this should be done in full recognition of the impact upon longer-term stability objectives. This not only means avoiding the recurrent pattern of deploying local militias for short-term gains at the expense of stability in the longer run, but it also entails recognizing the limited potential of a regional military force and divided Malian regime to secure northern Mali. Efforts aimed at restoring stability and state authority will therefore need to move beyond providing a predominantly military response to Mali's multifaceted crises.

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³² Analysts have pointed to recurrent tensions among the interim president, prime minister and former coup leaders, while continued factionalism within the army and police led to open confrontations in recent months.

NV, 2012); Marchal.

²⁴ The MNLA proved unable to maintain supply chains, lacked resources as well as popular support among most non-Tuareg communities and was driven out of the principal areas in northern Mali within weeks.

²⁵ MUJAO's Mauritanian leader originated from AQIM and the organization currently controls Gao. Various reports indicate their backbone consists of Arab smugglers, while the organization also rapidly secured its market share within the kidnapping industry.

²⁶ Ansar Eddine was established by Iyad Ag Ghaly, a first-hour Tuareg rebel from the dominant Ifoghas clan. He has been a key player in northern Malian politics during the last decade, involved in negotiations over the release of various hostages, working as a Malian diplomat in Saudi Arabia and being a convert of Tablighi Jama`at. After being sidelined within the MNLA, he established Ansar Eddine and originally attracted support from Ifoghas Tuareg and Kunta Arabs. Ousted from the urban areas, an unknown number of MNLA fighters are believed to have defected to his organization. Kidal is Ansar Eddine's stronghold.

²⁷ Lacher.

²⁸ "Mali's Self-Defense Militias Take the Reconquest of the North Into Their Own Hands," *Terrorism Monitor* 10:16 (2012).

²⁹ "Grand reportage: avec les miliciens qui veulent libérer le Mali," *Le Parisien*, November 2, 2012. Other members have publicly expressed their desire to take revenge against Arabs in northern Mali. See, for example, "Mali: le risque d'une guerre civile plane sur la ville d'Ansongo au nord du pays (habitants)," *Autre Presse*, October 30, 2012. All militias have at their disposal a vast pool of disgruntled youth who are much less ideologically motivated and primarily in search of income. Defections between the various groups occur frequently.

³⁰ Anne Look, "N. Mali Militias Train Youth to Fight," *Voice of America*, October 9, 2012; Peter Tinti, "Intervening in Northern Mali: Don't Forget the Ethnic Dimension," *ThinkAfricaPress*, November 19, 2012.

³¹ Ansar Eddine has formally distanced itself from the other "terrorist" groups with "foreign" elements, while it also restricted its objective to applying Shari`a law to its own stronghold in Kidal. Until recently, leaders of the various organizations were seen together in various urban centers and many questions about the nature of current relations in practice still persist.

An Algerian Press Review: Determining Algiers' Position on an Intervention in Mali

By Kal Ben Khalid

ON OCTOBER 29, 2012, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Algiers to discuss developments in northern Mali. One of the main purposes of her trip was to determine the role Algeria might play in a future military intervention. The goal of any intervention is to unseat from power three armed militant groups that control northern Mali—Ansar Eddine,¹ the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO)² and al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).³ Algeria is considered the main regional power in the Maghreb-Sahel region, with key economic and diplomatic influence in northern Mali. Algeria's cooperation is critical to the success of a potential military intervention.

Algeria's press coverage of the crisis in Mali and international efforts to respond to it have relied heavily on official Algerian government sources and reflect elite perspectives on northern Mali in one of North Africa's key power centers. In general, Algerian media coverage suggests that Algiers' widely reported public opposition to an international military intervention in northern Mali is easing.⁴ According

to many press accounts, while Algeria reportedly still favors a "political solution" to the crisis in Mali, it now appears that Algiers will participate in an international intervention within specified parameters and discretion. Algerian media reports remain divided, however, over whether military intervention is desirable, and several articles suggest that while Algiers has identified political processes it favors with respect to Mali, it has yet to decide on a desired end state from negotiations or military action.

This article will discuss the focus of Algerian press reports on Hillary Clinton's visit to Algiers, and how these reactions reflect Algerian perceptions of international efforts to intervene in northern Mali.

Algerian Press Perspectives on Intervention in Mali

Clinton's visit received extensive attention in mainstream Algerian newspapers. Coverage in the main private newspapers suggests that while the Algerian government has adopted a more flexible posture on military intervention in Mali, significant skepticism exists within Algeria's elite over the merits and potential outcomes of an intervention. Algeria is often deeply skeptical of international intervention schemes. As a former colony of France—born out of an eight-year war for independence—Algeria jealously guards its sovereignty. It warned Western governments against intervening in Libya's civil war in 2011, predicting that internationalizing the conflict would destabilize the region by strengthening terrorist groups such as AQIM. Algeria also fears that intensified conflict resulting from an intervention could spread into southern Algeria, where Algeria's own Tuareg minority lives and thousands of refugees from northern Mali have fled. These concerns are evident in a warning from Algeria's Interior Minister Daho Ould Kablia on November 8, 2012, when he said that an intervention would have "very serious" consequences for "local populations" in the region around Mali.⁵

Algerian press accounts focused heavily (and sometimes exclusively) on the security file, mostly neglecting agenda items in the energy sector and U.S. support for Algeria's World Trade Organization bid. While coverage in the semi-official newspaper *El Moudjabid* was overwhelmingly positive and focused on the visit as "reflecting strong relations," coverage in the private press was more diverse.⁶ Articles in *El Khabar*, one of Algeria's leading private Arabic-language newspapers, were dominated by security issues between October 28-31, with headlines almost exclusively about Mali and terrorism.

One story on October 29 described Algeria "in the heart of a diplomatic battle over sending its army to Mali."⁷ The article described Algerian concerns of "turning into Pakistan"⁸ if it became embroiled in a war in Mali with foreign

"Algerian media coverage suggests that Algiers' widely reported public opposition to military intervention in northern Mali is easing."

powers. In the article, a member of parliament (MP) from Tamanrasset called on Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to "maintain steadfastness" in its "traditional position in rejecting any foreign military intervention in the region," fearing anything else would "act as a gateway to a status quo of foreign military bases in the region."⁹ The MP warned that an intervention in Mali "will create many problems," stressing the need to continue dialogue. He said, "We know from all previous

1 Ansar Eddine is an Islamist faction that was founded by veteran Tuareg rebel leader Iyad Ag Ghaly in 2011 and is one of three main Islamist groups in control of northern Mali. Made up heavily of Tuareg fighters, it is close to AQIM and MUJAO. It has been particularly active in Timbuktu, and the Kidal region.

2 The Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) is one of three Islamist groups in control of northern Mali, especially the area around Gao. It emerged out of AQIM's network in northern Mali, although the specific circumstances around its origins are murky and controversial among analysts. The group is strongly comprised of a mix of Malian Arabs, Songhai, Arabs and others; it is rumored to have links to Gao-area merchant families and drug traffickers. It remains close to Ansar Eddine and AQIM.

3 The French posture is probably best summarized in the Agence France-Presse headline from October 28: "US, France Pressure Algeria to Stop Fence-sitting on Mali."

4 One headline of a story summarizing Clinton's meeting with Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika in the Arabic daily *Ech-Chorouk* described the visit as "The Last Meeting Before the Military Intervention in Mali."

5 "Ould Kablia: une intervention militaire au Mali aura des conséquences 'très graves' dans la région," *Algerie360*, November 8, 2012.

6 "Algeria USA: Clinton Visit Reflects 'Strong Relations,'" *El Moudjabid*, November 20, 2012.

7 "Pressured by Paris and Washington, Algeria in the Heart of a Diplomatic Battle to Send its Army to Mali," *El Khabar*, October 29, 2012.

8 This is a common refrain heard among Algerian officials concerned about or opposed to an intervention in Mali. See Anouar Boukhars, *The Paranoid Neighbor: Algeria and the Conflict in Mali* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012).

9 "Pressured by Paris and Washington, Algeria in the Heart of a Diplomatic Battle to Send its Army to Mali."

experiments beginning with foreign intervention that we cannot know how it ends and what happened in Libya is the best proof of this...military intervention in northern Mali will lead to a new colonization" spreading out of Mali and into Algeria.¹⁰ The MP also said that a group of Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA)¹¹ men had traveled to southern Algeria "for dialogue and then returned to Mali" recently as part of the government's efforts to find a political solution.¹² A major report on October 30 said that the United States and Algeria would follow up the meeting "within the context of bilateral military talks," while stating that "Washington persuaded Algeria to participate" at the military planning level without the participation of the National People's Army in a military intervention in Mali.¹³ The report said that Algerians would participate in planning sessions with West African military officials on November 2 and November 4.

Other *El Khabar* reports framed the visit as part of Washington's efforts to wage a proxy war against AQIM and emphasized differences "revealed by Algerian officials" over their views of the MNLA and Ansar Eddine (contrasting with reports elsewhere arguing that Algiers and Washington have similar views of the two groups).¹⁴ One article explained how some in the West see Algerian views of northern Mali as relevant "because Algeria differentiates between the different armed groups in northern Mali, and this helps to understand the social structure of the terrain inside northern Mali, rather than colliding

with it and turning it into a hotbed that attracts extremist groups [from abroad] under the pretext of resisting a foreign presence."¹⁵ It then pointed to reports that the AQIM-linked MUJAO is preparing for a foreign intervention in Gao by bringing in jihadists of various nationalities including Sudanese and Pakistanis.¹⁶

The report opined that the French-led approach to Mali looks to "recreate the American NATO model of involvement in Afghanistan" and argued that an intervention by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the West would be hampered by "armed groups well trained in guerrilla warfare, who enjoy freedom of movement in a vast desert area and their knowledge of the terrain gives superiority in combat, which will drain regular troops participating in the intervention."¹⁷

Algiers: Between Washington and Paris?

Algeria's leading private French-language daily, *El Watan*, also gave Clinton's visit prominent coverage. Its early reporting was mostly based on wire service or Algérie Presse Service reports. Longer, deeper articles from October 29-31 focused on security and Mali. These were somewhat consistent in their emphasis on describing shared U.S.-Algerian perceptions of the situation in Mali, while one article described the visit as having "cooled French ardor" by seeking to "cure" Algeria's chronic allergy to military intervention in Mali.¹⁸ Such reports described Clinton having "a better grasp of the political and security issues in Mali" than the French and as having "given all attention to concerns raised by the Algerian authorities."¹⁹ They argued that the United States understood "the complexity of the situation in Mali coldly, stepping away from the risky consequences which are hardly imaginable," for "the Americans do not want to commit blindly to the

quicksand of northern Mali, wanting to understand and know where they are setting their feet."²⁰ *El Watan* judged Clinton "much less committed to military action 'in a few weeks' as suggested by the [French] Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian."²¹

The article stated that "if Paris and Algiers agree in principal on the use of force against terrorists in northern Mali, they differ significantly on the identity of potential targets."²² The article then presented the intention of Algerian officials to "recover much of the elements of Ansar Eddine brought in through dialogue, in order to isolate the radicals."²³ An *El Watan* piece from November 1 described Algeria as "embedded" in planning for an intervention with West African militaries and noted that despite Algeria's acceptance of a role in an intervention, "the nature of the group Ansar Eddine...remains a point of contention, especially with France."²⁴ The article later quoted an anonymous diplomat as saying "the north of Mali is also the south of Algeria" before suggesting that Algeria intended to play a prominent role in a potential intervention.²⁵ "Information services such as the Foreign Ministry and Presidency are stingy with information" on what role Algeria seeks or plans to play in Mali, the article continued.²⁶

A brief opinion piece by well-known commentator Chawki Amari from the same day described Algeria as being pressured to allow its airspace to be used for an intervention but "unofficially, it [Algeria] is playing the benefits of America against those of France."²⁷ The piece criticized the Algerian government for not being clearer with its own citizens about its intentions in Mali.

10 Ibid.

11 The MNLA is one of three armed groups that took control of northern Mali in 2012. A mostly Tuareg group founded in October 2011, the MNLA's fighters and leaders include many Tuaregs who served in the Libyan military or fled from Libya during 2011. Self-described secularists, the MNLA, with Ansar Eddine, initiated the 2012 rebellion against the Malian government. It was eventually marginalized by AQIM and its Islamist allies in Ansar Eddine and MUJAO after defeating the Malian army in the key northern cities; it currently controls a few towns in northern Mali.

12 "Pressured by Paris and Washington, Algeria in the Heart of a Diplomatic Battle to Send its Army to Mali."

13 "Clinton Persuades Algeria to Participate in the 'Planning' Committee for a Military Intervention in Mali," *El Khabar*, October 30, 2012.

14 "Washington and Paris: Proxy War Against al-Qa`ida in North Africa," *El Khabar*, October 31, 2012.

15 "Washington and Paris: Proxy War Against al-Qa`ida in North Africa."

16 Ibid.; Andrew Lebovich, "What to Make of Foreign Fighters in Mali," *al-Wasat*, October 30, 2012.

17 "Washington and Paris: Proxy War Against al-Qa`ida in North Africa."

18 "Crise malienne: Mme Clinton partage la position algérienne," *El Watan*, October 30, 2012.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 "La participation algérienne se précise," *El Watan*, November 1, 2012.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Chawki Amari, "Une blonde à Alger," *El Watan*, October 30, 2012.

Certain press reports described Clinton's visit as a power play by either Paris or Algiers to use the United States as a check on the other's influence over international plans for an intervention in Mali. These reports tended to focus on differences in Algerian and French views of the heavily Tuareg Islamist group Ansar Eddine, with which Algeria

“Algeria views those elements of Ansar Eddine close to historical Tuareg rebel leader Iyad Ag Ghaly as susceptible to a ‘political solution’ and having the credibility among key Tuareg demographics in the Kidal region to help counter AQIM.”

has reportedly engaged in discussions and negotiations during the last several months (another track of talks has been led by officials from Burkina Faso). French officials have dismissed Algerian efforts to splinter factions within Ansar Eddine away from AQIM. Algeria views those elements of Ansar Eddine close to historical Tuareg rebel leader Iyad Ag Ghaly as susceptible to a “political solution” and having the credibility among key Tuareg demographics in the Kidal region to help counter AQIM.²⁸ Algerian press accounts place this disagreement near the center of Algerian objections to plans for an international intervention. Some Algerian outlets presented Clinton's visit as vindication of the Algerian view that more time for “dialogue” between Algerian officials and elements of Ansar Eddine is needed before an invasion.

28 Jean-Felix Paganon, the French special envoy for the Sahel, told *Jeune Afrique* in October: “The behavior of Ansar Eddine is that of a group totally linked to the terrorists of AQIM. They are in the same camp. But many countries in the region, such as Algeria, and many analysts believe that negotiations are possible with Ansar Eddine and that to understand the organization as supporting terrorism is a mistake. We shall see...” See “Jean-Félix Paganon: ‘Tout le monde est désormais engagé’ dans la reconquête du Nord-Mali,” *Jeune Afrique*, October 22, 2012.

Liberte took a different line, previewing the visit on October 28 with a piece stating that “there is every reason to believe that the United States will continue to exert further pressure on Algiers trying to sell it on certain points, knowing that differences lay in the role that Algeria should play according to the Western model.”²⁹ *Liberte* reported that “Algeria, according to Western officials, has moderated its position [on foreign intervention] and accepts an African intervention force. It refuses, however, to be directly involved in this process which it considers highly risky.”³⁰ It also reported that Algeria refused over-flight rights to France during an intervention. The report, published on the eve of Clinton's visit, also accused U.S. officials of “issuing contradictory statements,” complaining that “it is as though some officials who have visited Algiers have spoken openly against foreign intervention in Mali, whereas others have rather supported the French proposal.”³¹ The piece highlighted how both Washington and Algiers are approaching Mali with “strategic aspects” in mind: “the United States does not want to repeat the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan in the Sahel, as Algeria does not want to have a fire on its southern border...The question now remains as to why the Western countries want Algeria to enlist in a transaction that may be part of a vicious cycle.”³² The article then described the economic elements of the U.S.-Algeria Strategic Dialogue framework, noting that “by the admission of American officials, Algeria offers unlimited opportunities.”³³

An October 29 *Liberte* report described “the American perspective on Mali.” The United States, it said, views Mali facing multiple challenges “of equal importance which must be solved simultaneously.”³⁴ *Liberte* described Washington and Algiers as being on “the same wavelength” on the issue, with Algiers supporting United Nations

29 Rubrique Radar, “Hillary Clinton ne compte pas rempiler,” *Liberte*, October 28, 2012; Djilali Benyoub, “Hillary Clinton chez Bouteflika pour parler du Mali,” *Liberte*, October 28, 2012.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Djamel Bouatta, “Hillary Clinton à Alger: Le point de vue américain sur le Mali,” *Liberte*, October 29, 2012.

Security Council resolutions calling for the African Union and regional bodies to plan operations to remove the armed groups from the north. It briefly reflected on U.S. views of the humanitarian crisis in the region, focused mainly on the overflow of refugees into neighboring countries. The article quoted U.S. statements urging Mali's neighbors (such as Algeria) to support an intervention and to take responsibility for resolving the country's problems.

One strand of Algerian press accounts presented the Clinton visit as an Algerian attempt to play Washington off of Paris as a means of conditioning international plans for an intervention in a way favorable to the Algerian position. One representative report on

“Some Algerian outlets presented Clinton's visit as vindication of the Algerian view that more time for ‘dialogue’ between Algerian officials and elements of Ansar Eddine is needed before an invasion.”

the French-language news site *Tout Sur Algerie* argued that Clinton's visit was intended to offset French pressure over a Mali intervention by using the United States to shape an outcome in Mali closer to Algiers' image—the visit would be “a boon for Algiers which has long sought an ally to counter French intransigence on several points, including dialogue with Ansar Eddine and the timing of a military intervention.”³⁵ Algerian concerns over an intervention are thus not a question of ends but merely means. According to *Tout Sur Algerie*, Algerian officials see the U.S. position contrasting with the French one (and being similar to its own) in two ways: 1) Ansar Eddine “can be part of a political solution within the framework of a credible dialogue with the Mali

35 Samir Allam, “Alger accueille Hillary Clinton avec l'espoir de renforcer sa position face à Paris,” *Tout Sur Algerie*, October 28, 2012.

authorities,”³⁶ and 2) “an intervention must be well thought out, well prepared, well funded and well informed so as to avoid collateral damage that would aggravate the situation in a region destabilized by many problems.”³⁷ The *Tout Sur Algerie* report noted that the Algerians were pleased to have Clinton visit without a stopover in Paris.³⁸ The article said that while Algeria opposes foreign troops using its territory during an intervention, it “has not yet ruled on issues such as over-flights in its airspace during a military intervention and the exchange of information on terrorist groups.”³⁹ The report concluded that “it is indeed easier for Algiers to grant concessions to the Americans than the French.”⁴⁰

At the same time, a column by Mustapha Hammouche on October 28 noted that “Algeria does not have a clear position on the question of intervention in Mali.”⁴¹ Hammouche argued that Algeria is right to “maintain its decision not to take part” in plans for a Mali intervention, arguing that Algeria and France disagree over the nature of armed groups in northern Mali (i.e., Ansar Eddine) and described Mali as a weak state “plagued by corruption and the unpopularity of an unjust regime with tribes and ethnic groups after squandering a good part of the few democratic achievements of the country”—in line with the descriptions Algerian officials often give of the “root causes” of Mali’s numerous troubles. Hammouche attributed Mali’s overall troubles to “unfinished decolonization” in which borders are inconsistent with the demography, with

36 This view is especially strong in articles like this from November 3 in which Algerian sources intimate to *El Watan* that Ansar Eddine’s leader, Iyad Ag Ghaly, would make an announcement splitting from AQIM in the coming days. The Algerians will likely hold any such announcement as validation of their policy over the last several months; it remains to be seen what process can be fashioned out of such a development, although it would give many actors greater freedom of movement and space for creativity. See “Clinton-Bouteflika: The Last Meeting Before Military Intervention in Mali,” *Ech-Chorouk*, October 29, 2012.

37 Allam.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Mustapha Hammouche, “Le syndrome malien,” *Liberte*, October 28, 2012.

post-colonial regimes antagonizing and repressing ethnic dissent.

In opposition-oriented sources, similar narratives emerged, although with a closer eye toward their domestic implications. For example, the French-language opposition paper *Le Matin* carried similar reports to those found in the *Tout Sur Algerie* article.⁴² One such report quoted an International Crisis Group analyst as saying that it is likely Washington is more understanding of Algerian concerns over foreign intervention than Paris; it noted that with a French lead, Algiers would be forced to “abandon the dialogue it initiated last June” with Ansar Eddine. Another story in *Le Matin* puzzled over the Algerian view of Ansar Eddine:

According to Paris and Washington, Ansar Dine, MUJAO and AQIM are the same breed of terrorism. In contrast, for Bouteflika, Ansar Eddine has nothing to do with MUJAO or AQIM. This is why Bouteflika wants to save the lost soldier Iyad Ag Ghaly and his group Ansar Eddine...How many Islamist battalions embedded with the MNLA at the beginning of the year? What does Algiers see in Iyad Ag Ghaly? Is he a mole of the DRS [Algeria’s Department of Intelligence and Security], as suggested by some commentators on the Sahel question?⁴³

Le Matin also published another piece criticizing Bouteflika for not communicating more often on foreign affairs, which the author claimed are only made clear to the Algerian public “during visits by foreign diplomats” which is also when they “are informed that their president is still alive.”⁴⁴

Conclusion

Algerian press reporting of U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s Algiers trip suggests Algeria is strongly concerned about spillover effects of an intervention and the impact it might

42 “Crise au Mali: Alger entre la diplomatie de Washington et les pressions de Paris,” *Le Matin*, October 29, 2012.

43 “Intervention militaire dans l’Azawad: Alger veut sauver Ansar Dine,” *Le Matin*, October 30, 2012.

44 “Bouteflika: un président à distance,” *Le Matin*, October 30, 2012.

have on Algerian efforts to divide AQIM’s Malian Islamist supporters. Press reactions to Clinton’s meetings in Algiers suggest positive responses to the visit as recognition and validation of Algeria’s position as a regional power. It implies that Algeria will likely play a role in an intervention but will probably seek to shape its scope according to its own interests and concerns. Algerian elite opinion appears divided as to the merits and viability of an intervention in Mali.

While much of the reporting indicates perceptions of shared Algerian and U.S. perspectives on northern Mali, it is not clear that this is a consensus view among Algeria’s elites. Press reporting indicates that Algerian officials and local elites, notably in southern Algeria, believe that a military intervention internationalizing the Mali crisis could spread into Algeria’s border regions, which currently host thousands of refugees and are home to vulnerable communities. These sentiments have likely contributed to Algeria’s preference for a “negotiated solution” through elements of Ansar Eddine while putting off a potential armed intervention. It does not appear, however, that Algeria rejects military intervention in general. Instead, Algeria prefers a longer timeline for a potential intervention and sees this outcome less optimal than an alternative process. At the same time, media discussion shows that Algeria fears being drawn into an international military effort in Mali from which it cannot extract itself.

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Serious Leadership Rifts Emerge in Afghan Taliban

By Anand Gopal

THE AFGHAN TALIBAN are perhaps the most cohesive political force in Afghanistan's history. While nearly every other faction across the spectrum has suffered splits and realignments, the Taliban leadership has remained remarkably unified and consistent in membership throughout the various iterations of war during the last two decades.

In recent months, however, this leadership has shown the first signs of sustained internal divisions: certain commanders have been dismissed from the insurgents' top brass, spats have erupted between leading figures, and a growing number of field commanders are contravening the orders of their superiors. In the process, a political struggle between blocs favoring and opposing talks with the United States has emerged. This article describes these developments and attempts to assess what impact, if any, they have on the prospects for a negotiated settlement to end the war.¹

Causes of Leadership Division

Like any organization, the Taliban has always contained factions and differing allegiances that stem from non-homogenous conceptions of polity. During the Islamic emirate of the 1990s, informal blocs formed around a variety of disagreements, most strikingly on Usama bin Ladin's activities in Afghanistan.² During the insurgency period (post-2003), top Taliban figures have differed on the efficacy and morality of suicide bombings.³ These were mostly tactical and strategic

disagreements. In the last two years, however, three developments opened the way for a set of substantive, political disagreements within the organization: Taliban leader Mullah Baradar's arrest, the U.S. military's targeting of mid-level commanders, and the initiation of peace talks with Washington.

In his decade in hiding, Taliban supreme leader Mullah Omar has operated away from the rest of the insurgency, presumably due to the protection (or, according to some, quasi-imprisonment) of Pakistani intelligence. Baradar, the day-to-day leader of the insurgency until 2010, was one of the few who enjoyed access to Mullah Omar, and in this capacity came to wield enormous influence within the movement.⁴ Baradar's strong links with Mullah Omar (the two hail from the same district in Uruzgan and were childhood friends), his background as a frontline commander, and his political acumen allowed him to bridge the Taliban's traditional divide between military and political leadership. In the process, he became a major binding factor in the insurgency.

When Pakistan arrested Baradar in the winter of 2010, reportedly due to unauthorized contacts with the Karzai government, the leadership bifurcated into two networks.⁵ Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansur, the former civil aviation minister in the Taliban government, heads the first, and the second is under the command of Mullah Zakir, an ex-Guantanamo Bay detainee.⁶ Confusion over the chain of command, absent during Baradar's tenure, now features frequently in dealings between the Karachi- and Quetta-based Taliban leadership and the rank-and-file in Afghanistan.⁷

At the same time, the capture-kill U.S. military campaign between 2009 and 2011 killed a few thousand suspected insurgents, according to ISAF press releases.⁸ A significant number were field commanders, which amounts to the wholesale removal of a layer of local insurgent leadership. Whereas many field commanders from the 2006-2008 period were likely to be associated with the Taliban government of the 1990s—and by extension the Quetta *shura*—by now many Taliban units are under a fourth or fifth generation of local leadership.⁹ As a consequence, ties between the Quetta *shura* and the

“Ties between the Quetta shura and the field corps appear to be at their weakest point this decade, with Taliban figures and tribal elders reporting that cases of insubordination are more common now than ever before.”

field corps appear to be at their weakest point this decade, with Taliban figures and tribal elders reporting that cases of insubordination are more common now than ever before.¹⁰ In Baghlan Province, for example, a prominent commander refused to turn over a portion of taxes his unit collected to Peshawar, as per

Karachi, while its military command is in Quetta. Peshawar forms the third major Taliban center, overseeing affairs in the east. All three cities are in Pakistan.

⁸ Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, “A Knock on the Door: 22 Months of ISAF Press Releases,” Afghanistan Analysts Network, October 12, 2011.

⁹ This article uses the term “Quetta *shura*” as shorthand for the Taliban leadership. The actual *shura* is merely symbolic. The real loci of power in the leadership exist in clusters of informal networks and on bodies such as the Military Commission.

¹⁰ Personal interviews, senior Western official involved in appraising the security situation, 2011; personal interview, Western NGO security officer, 2010; personal interview, member of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan's political team, 2010; personal interviews, dozens of tribal elders in Baghlan, Kandahar, Loya Paktia and Kabul, Afghanistan, 2010-2011; personal interview, Taliban member connected to the political *shura*, Dubai, 2012.

¹ Much of this article is based on interviews conducted by the author with Taliban figures this summer in the United Arab Emirates and with members based in Pakistan over phone or Skype. These members spoke on the condition of anonymity. The author also interviewed three Western authorities—including one U.S. and one UN official.

² Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, *An Enemy We Created: The Myth of the Taliban/Al Qaeda Merger in Afghanistan, 1970-2010* (London: Hurst, 2011).

³ Antonio Giustozzi ed., *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

⁴ Personal interviews, members of the Taliban political *shura*, Kandahar, Afghanistan, 2008. Also see Ron Moreau, “America's New Nightmare,” *Newsweek*, July 24, 2009.

⁵ Dexter Filkins, “Pakistanis Tell of Motive in Taliban Leader's Arrest,” *New York Times*, August 22, 2010.

⁶ Personal interview, Taliban member connected to the Quetta *shura*'s political wing, Dubai, 2012; personal interview, Taliban commanders and tribal elders, Kandahar, Afghanistan, 2010; personal interview, Alex Strick van Linschoten, 2010; personal interview, U.S. State Department official, 2011; personal interview, UN Security Council official, New York, 2012.

⁷ The Taliban's political leadership is largely based in

Taliban rules. Ignoring punitive efforts by the leadership, he simply established his own freelance armed group.¹¹

Finally, news of contacts between the United States and Mullah Omar's representative Tayeb Agha, along with an agreement to open a political office in Qatar, have throttled the Taliban community. There is now, according to Taliban insiders, a community of hardliners in the leadership who oppose negotiations or are mistrustful of Washington's intentions, and those more open to a settlement.¹² In general, the hawks are clustered in the military command and the doves on the political side, but this does not tell the whole story.

Divisions

Three cases highlight the nature of these divisions. The first relates to a senior Taliban figure named Mullah Abdul Raouf Khadem, an Alizai from Kajaki, Helmand Province, who was a prominent military commander during the Taliban regime. In 2001, he quit the Taliban and surrendered to the Northern Alliance, who promptly betrayed him by turning him over to U.S. custody.¹³ He ended up in Guantanamo Bay, which, according to other inmates, further radicalized him.¹⁴ Upon his release in 2007, he quickly rejoined the Taliban and climbed to a senior position on the Quetta *shura's* Military Commission, which oversees fighting countrywide, and became an officially designated deputy to Mullah Omar.¹⁵

Khadem emerged as a hardliner, often acting against the party line. In 2010, a series of "night letters" bearing his name appeared in southern Afghanistan that

threatened to kill entire groups of tribal elders in certain villages.¹⁶ When elders appealed to the Taliban leadership, they were told that "it was out of their hands," according to one interlocutor, and that Khadem was ignoring orders.¹⁷ Some months later, he produced literature extolling the virtues of Wahhabism, contrary to the mainstream Taliban theological line of Deobandism. For these and other transgressions, he was stripped of his position on the leadership *shura* and shunted to the relatively unimportant shadow governorship of Uruzgan Province. When he was eventually relieved of this post as well, he relocated to a Pakistani border town and, according to Taliban figures, established a quasi-independent group that opposed negotiations.¹⁸ Since then, his name has been linked to a number of actions that have fallen outside of the Taliban's official sanction, such as the assassination of Burhanuddin Rabbani and the activities of the so-called Mullah Dadullah Front, which claimed the murder of High Peace Council member and ex-Taliban minister Arsala Rahmani. It remains unclear, however, whether he is indeed involved in these activities or if his name presents a convenient false flag for others inside the movement.¹⁹

The second major incident concerns a powerful Taliban commander named Mawlawi Ismael, an Andar from Ghazni, who was appointed by Baradar in 2009 as shadow governor of Zabul Province. In that capacity, Ismael took advantage of a key stretch of highway

running through the province to extort NATO supply convoys, earning millions in revenue.²⁰ In the wake of Baradar's arrest, Ismael became one of the most important commanders in the country and was selected to head the Quetta *shura's* all-important Military Commission.

His fall came as quickly as his rise. It began when he attempted to clamp down on field commanders raising funds independently of command and control chains—in particular, the case of Baz Muhammad, a prominent Taliban member from Farah Province. Muhammad employed his cross-border Noorzai tribal networks to raise funds that he refused to share with the Quetta leadership. When Ismael arrested one of Muhammad's principle fundraisers in an effort to force him to hand over the money, Muhammad retaliated by beating and kidnapping Ismael.²¹ This response—Ismael held the most important military position in the country—is unprecedented in the organization's history.²²

The Taliban top command eventually stepped in to free the two parties and resolve the issue. Not long after, in April 2012, Ismael found himself embroiled in another fight with commanders in Zabul Province over money, and some reports claimed that one of the commanders ended up dead.²³ Around the same time, the Quetta *shura* arrested Ismael after he had unauthorized contact with the United Nations, possibly as an opening for talks, in which money allegedly changed hands.²⁴ He thus became one of the highest-ranking members of the Taliban ever to be detained by

11 Personal interviews, tribal elders, mullahs, police officials, Baghlan Province, Afghanistan, 2011.

12 Personal interview, Taliban member connected to the Quetta *shura's* political wing, Dubai, 2012; personal interview, second Taliban member connected to the Quetta *shura's* political wing, 2012; personal interview, a former high-ranking government official during the Taliban regime, 2012; personal interview, Michael Semple, 2012.

13 Anand Gopal, "Qayum Zakir: The Afghanistan Taliban's Rising Mastermind," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 30, 2010.

14 Personal interviews, government officials, tribal elders and Taliban commanders, Helmand and Kandahar provinces, Afghanistan, March and June 2010.

15 "Afghan Taliban Chief Appoints Two Deputies," *The News International*, March 29, 2010.

16 The author received and read copies of these night letters. Also see personal interviews, tribal elders in Panjwayi, Kandahar, Afghanistan, 2010.

17 Personal interview, Agha Lalai Dastagiri, head of the Peace and Reconciliation Commission, Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, 2010; personal interviews, tribal elders, Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, 2010.

18 Personal interview, Taliban member connected to the Quetta *shura's* political wing, Dubai, 2012; personal interview, second Taliban member connected to the Quetta *shura's* political wing, 2012; personal interview, UN Security Council official, New York, 2012; personal interview, Michael Semple, 2012.

19 The Mullah Dadullah Front is an ad-hoc faction within the Afghan Taliban that emerged following the expulsion of Mullah Bakht (also known as Mullah Mansur Dadullah) from the Taliban in 2008 for insubordination. It is unclear if the name is used by hardliners in the organization as a false flag or if a coherent group with the name actually exists.

20 Personal interviews, Afghan government officials and tribal elders, Zabul, Afghanistan, 2010.

21 Personal interview, Taliban member connected to the Quetta *shura's* political wing, Dubai, 2012; personal interview, second Taliban member connected to the Quetta *shura's* political wing, 2012; personal interview, Michael Semple, 2012; Ron Moreau, "Feud Splits the Taliban," *Newsweek*, August 17, 2012.

22 Ibid.

23 Nasim Hotak, "Senior Taliban Leader Shot Dead in Quetta," *Pajhwok Afghan News*, April 17, 2012.

24 Personal interview, UN Security Council official, New York, 2012; personal interview, second Taliban member connected to the Quetta *shura's* political wing, 2012. In some interviews, Taliban and Western officials deny this claim. Either way, it is likely that the Zabul struggle is directly related to Ismael's arrest in some way.

the Taliban itself. He is now under house arrest and has been removed from any official positions within the movement.²⁵ In the process, his wide and influential network within Afghanistan has been thrown awry. Mullah Ghulam Hassan, one of his allies, released a video proclaiming Ismael's innocence and threatening to kill members of the Quetta *shura*. Others have allegedly broken with his network and with the Taliban proper, now instead operating as independent armed factions.

While Ismael and Khadem were relative newcomers in the Taliban's upper echelons, infighting has also reached the leadership's innermost circles. Agha Jan Mutasim, a longstanding member who served in a number of important

“The danger inherent in the hardline position is that by opposing a settlement, that member might lose out if such an agreement is indeed reached.”

political roles for the Quetta *shura*, was gunned down by unknown assailants in Karachi in 2011.²⁶ He survived and fled the country, subsequently suggesting that hardliners opposing his advocacy of negotiations were responsible.²⁷ Others claim the shooting stemmed from suspicions that he embezzled Taliban funds a few years before, or that he fell victim to feuding between the Muttahida Quami Movement and Pashtuns in Karachi, or even that Mullah Omar himself ordered his assassination.²⁸ Whatever the reason, Mutasim now stands as the most senior Taliban member ever forced out of the movement.

²⁵ Some press reports mistakenly stated that the Taliban executed Ismael.

²⁶ Sami Yousafzai and Ron Moreau, “Afghanistan: A Moderate Defies the Taliban,” *The Daily Beast*, April 25, 2012.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ See, for instance, “Exclusive Interviews with Top Taliban Leaders,” Japanese Broadcasting Corporation, September 11, 2012.

The three incidents are a marked departure from the Taliban's past cohesion. Although spats are common in any organization, there is little record of leadership-level disputes descending into violence or open breaks with the Taliban's doctrine at that level. Taliban interviewees could not state similar examples from the post-2003 insurgency period.²⁹

Prospects for the Future

Each of these three cases intersect, in some way, with the question of peace negotiations. When news of Tayeb Agha's meetings with the United States leaked, it created a mini-crisis for the Taliban leadership, who faced the problem of convincing their rank-and-file to support their peace initiatives while simultaneously asking them to risk their lives on the battlefield.³⁰ Many second-order effects ensued; fundraising, for instance, became more of a challenge, to the point that the *shura's* Financial Commission issued a rare public appeal for donations directly on the Taliban's website.³¹ In this regard, the Quetta *shura's* messaging and positioning vis-à-vis negotiations should be seen as directed as much to their own members and supporters as to the outside world.

Disagreement abounds within Taliban circles as to whether Washington is a trustworthy negotiating partner and whether it is more politically astute to simply wait the Americans out until the 2014 withdrawal deadline—in other words, there is an ongoing political struggle between pro-war and pro-negotiations blocs. At the same time, and perhaps overlaid with this, there appears a growing divergence

²⁹ The sole exception might be the feud between Mullah Dadullah and Mullah Akhtar Osmani, which ended when both were separately killed by coalition airstrikes in 2006 and 2007. In Taliban circles, the rumor persists that one or both of these leaders (or their relatives) used coalition forces to eliminate the other, but evidence is scant and there is reporting indicating otherwise. Personal interviews, Taliban members connected to the Quetta *shura's* political wing, 2012.

³⁰ Personal interview, Taliban member connected to the Quetta *shura's* political wing, Dubai, 2012; personal interview, second Taliban member connected to the Quetta *shura's* political wing, 2012; personal interview, a former high-ranking government official during the Taliban regime, 2012; personal interview, Michael Semple, 2012.

³¹ This statement is available on Taliban websites.

of Taliban tactics. In recent months, insurgents have increasingly targeted civilians—even when there is no discernible military target nearby—such as an August attack on a market in Nimroz Province.³² These assaults may be a reflection of the growing cadre of younger Taliban leaders who are less tied to their communities than previous generations, although it is too early to say with certainty.

Regardless, even some considered hardliners (who tend to be on the military side) have made overtures or sent feelers to the Afghan government and Western officials.³³ In a way, there appears to be a deeper logic at work, where every member of the leadership is attempting to situate himself for the coming post-2014 world. The danger inherent in the hardline position is that by opposing a settlement, that member might lose out if such an agreement is indeed reached. This is, in effect, the delicate balance those across Afghanistan's political spectrum have had to master during the past 30 years of war, where fortunes can change at a moment's notice.

These dynamics indicate that leadership-level divisions are not irrevocable. In interviews, Taliban who support negotiations complain that they have nothing to show their more skeptical comrades from their engagement with Washington, which suggests that if the talks achieve substantive confidence building measures—such as the exchange of prisoners—they might have a unifying effect that will aid in an eventual settlement.

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³² “Afghan Civilians Targeted in Wave of Attacks,” al-Jazeera, August 15, 2012.

³³ The author has evidence of a number of such cases.

Shabiha Militias and the Destruction of Syria

By Stephen Starr

SINCE THE REVOLT in Syria descended into civil war, attention has largely focused on the growing effectiveness and influence of jihadist groups fighting in the country.¹ Members of Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham have featured prominently fighting alongside secular rebels from street skirmishes with regime troops in Aleppo to battling for control of state military bases, particularly in the country's north, to partaking in suicide missions against government targets in Aleppo, Damascus and other cities.² Yet while both foreign and Syrian jihadists probably number a couple thousand fighters,³ the regime-backed *shabiha* militiamen—pro-Bashar al-Assad gangs and security enforcers—may number close to 10,000.⁴ They have the backing of and share a common identity with both the country's Alawite civilian population—which comprise about 12% of the country—and the crumbling Ba'athist state itself.⁵ *Shabiha* militias also feel they have a genuine historical and political claim to the land, where non-indigenous fighters among the rebels have none.

This article reviews the background, actions and potential future role that *shabiha* militias may play beyond the increasingly inevitable fall of the al-Assad regime and the ongoing breakdown of Syria's social fabric.

1 "Tentative Jihad: Syria's Fundamental Opposition," International Crisis Group, October 12, 2012; Aaron Y. Zelin, "Jihadists in Syria Can be Found on The Internet," *al-Monitor*, October 18, 2012.

2 Aron Lund, "Holy Warriors," *Foreign Policy*, October 15, 2012. For a more detailed examination, see Aron Lund "Syrian Jihadism," Swedish Institute of International Affairs, September 14, 2012.

3 Martin Chulov, "Syria's Rebels Fear Foreign Jihadis in Their Midst," *Guardian*, November 1, 2012.

4 Joe Sterling, "Regime-Backed Militia Does Syria's 'Dirty Work,' Analysts Say," CNN, June 8, 2012; "Shabiha Militiamen, Tools of the Syria Regime," Agence France-Presse, June 10, 2012.

5 In the early years of his rule, President Hafiz al-Assad filled government ministries (as well as the security forces) with hundreds of thousands of his co-religionist Alawite civilians to solidify his strategic base but also to reduce the possibility of defections.

Mafia Beginnings

A word rarely heard before March 2011, the original term *shabiha*, meaning "ghosts," referred to the darkened-windowed Mercedes-Benz cars used in the 1970s and 1980s by Alawite smugglers from the Syrian coast.⁶ Among the original bootlegging leaders included Malik and Jamil al-Assad, a half-brother and brother respectively of former Syrian President Hafiz al-Assad. These men and others made huge profits smuggling cigarettes and luxury items from Lebanon. They terrorized local populations, openly carried weapons and considered themselves beyond the reach of the law in part because of their ties to the ruling family.⁷ As president, Hafiz al-Assad and later his sons Mahir and Basil arrested many of these smugglers and for the most part brought their criminal enterprises under control after they began to undermine the state's authority. Yet since March 2011, they have been recast by the regime as an indispensable force of intimidation and repression against dissenting populations.

At a time when peaceful protests were more widespread across Syria than they are today, militias including those with ties to the "original" Alawite *shabiha* gangsters, vigilante gangs and pro-regime civilians were deployed to intimidate, beat and detain protestors.⁸ As it quickly became clear, earlier methods failed to coerce protestors, and sticks and batons were quickly substituted with guns, knives and brutal forms of torture and repression.⁹

6 Richard Engel, "Rebels Fear Syria's 'Ghost Fighters,' the Regime's Hidden Militia," NBC, July 26, 2012.

7 "The Original Shabiha by Mohammad D.," SyriaComment, August 17, 2012.

8 Yassin al-Haj Salih, "The Syrian Shabiha and Their State," Heinrich Boll Stiftung, April 2012; "Shabiha Militiamen, Tools of the Syria Regime"; Peter Kellier, "Ghosts of Syria: Diehard Militias who Kill in the Name of Assad," *Guardian*, May 31, 2012.

9 At the start of the revolt, these militia men had yet to be titled, but began appearing at demonstrations whereby through the use of force attempted to quell dissent to the regime. *Shabiha* are not readily identifiable. They do not move with the military but can seamlessly move past checkpoints and into dissenting areas because of the effigies on their car windows and the accents with which they speak. They dress in military fatigues, tracksuits (as is common among men from Syria's coastal region), or a mixture of both. Most travel in civilian cars with pictures of President Bashar al-Assad adorned upon them. Inter-

Although hard evidence is difficult to acquire, a leading Damascus-based journalist claimed in 2011 that the *shabiha*'s numbers swelled with the release of hundreds of criminals from prison during a number of government amnesties.¹⁰ As such, the established *shabiha*—those with close familial ties to the al-Assads—were positioned to command newly released criminals whose loyalty had been bought by the regime.

As in the cases of Houla,¹¹ Dariya,¹² and other cities, one tactic employed by the regime to quell dissent in towns and villages close to sensitive areas¹³ appears to involve sending in paramilitary *shabiha* to carry out summary executions of civilians and to then disfigure the bodies on a mass, indiscriminate scale.¹⁴ The tactic in these cases, it appears, is to drive fear into the local populations so that they discontinue their dissidence. Whether such massacres are conducted with the aim of forcefully moving Sunni communities away from areas deemed vital to the regime's interests and survival and can therefore be understood as ethnic cleansing is unclear, but it is not to be discounted given the religious makeup and sectarian nature of the *shabiha*'s leading figures.

estingly, as the revolt became more widespread, many new regime vehicles appeared in towns and cities around Syria. They were expensive, modern models that had not been seen before, and they drew the attention of civilians unfamiliar with their "comings and goings" through residential neighborhoods.

10 Personal interview, Damascus-based journalist, 2011. This interview is expanded in Stephen Starr, *Revolt in Syria: Eye-Witness to the Uprising* (London/New York: Hurst/Columbia University Press, 2012). Also see Zeina Karam, "Syria Frees 70 Political Prisoners, Arrest 200 Protestors," *Arab News*, March 26, 2011; "Syria Releases Hundreds of Prisoners But Violence Continues," Voice of America, November 4, 2011.

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

12 Phil Sands, "Daraya, a Town Haunted by The Price of Defiance," *The National*, October 18, 2012.

13 Be they military in the case of Dariya, or adjacent to Alawite-populated towns and villages in the cases of Houla and Tremseh.

14 Richard Beeston, "Mutilated Bodies Mark a Rout, but Defiance Lives On," *Times of London*, February 2, 2012.

Other events suggest some *shabiha* groups may no longer be acting under the regime's direct command and control. Armed by the state security forces and possibly by Hizb Allah¹⁵ since the early days of the uprising, some now portray contempt for the national military forces because of their inability to effectively quell the uprising.¹⁶

Once fighting for a cause—the Syrian state with Bashar al-Assad at its head—*shabiha* militias today are fighting for the al-Assad family and the network of contacts surrounding it, which, importantly, they see as being the best guarantees of securing their own

“Little is known of the shabiha leadership, where it exists today, but prominent figures are likely to be trusted relatives of powerful Alawite groups such as the Shalish, Makhlof and Deeb families.”

future interests. Although both *shabiha* and regular government forces have been defeated in most of the north, paramilitary groups are still carrying out widespread detention and torture operations in areas further south, particularly in and around Damascus, Homs and Deraa. Damascus is viewed as key to deciding the eventual outcome of the revolt.

¹⁵ This assertion is based on uncorroborated comments from a Syrian civilian familiar with *shabiha* commanders in Damascus in December 2011. Also see Nicholas Blandford and Tom Coughlan, “1,500 Hezbollah in Syria: Assad Bolstered by Military Assistance,” *The Times*, October 6, 2012.

¹⁶ In the words of one *shabiha* member quoted by Reuters, “Bashar will stay in power as long as I have breath in my body, but his army leaders are rats. My guys and I work for ourselves, without orders from anybody.” See “Syria’s Paramilitary Gangs a Law Unto Themselves,” Reuters, July 2, 2012.

The regime has predicted and warned of a situation in Syria similar to Afghanistan.¹⁷ The spread of civil disorder, petty crime and kidnappings—the majority of which may be attributed to the actions of *shabiha* gangs—supports the regime’s own rhetoric that the uprising means an increasingly unstable climate.

The Elephant in a Bloody Room

Alawites, from whom the vast majority of *shabiha* members and leadership are drawn, comprise about 12% of Syria’s population. Areas such as Mezzah 86 in southwest Damascus, a sea of poorly-constructed houses set upon a hill overlooking the city and located several hundred meters from the main presidential palace, are virtually inaccessible to outsiders. This area, built to house the many thousands of Alawites who moved to the capital to take up government jobs during Hafiz al-Assad’s presidency, is today surrounded on all sides by *shabiha* and checkpoints. For the Alawite residents here, the government has provided electricity and water for decades without charge—inextricably intertwining the fate of this population to that of the state.

These civilians clearly feel that the revolt—which they view through a sectarian lens—is an existential threat. Incendiary government propaganda and a recent bombing in Mezzah 86 believed to have been carried out by a rebel group add to this fear as well as entrenching the feeling among *shabiha* members that they must kill or be killed.¹⁸

Another key feature binding the fate of Syria’s Alawites and pro-government militias with the regime is the state-imposed segregation of Alawites in areas across the country. In the 1970s and 1980s, the state erected hundreds of enclosed military housing complexes to provide free housing to thousands of military officers—almost entirely Alawites—and their families.¹⁹ Today,

¹⁷ Andrew Gilligan, “Assad: Challenge Syria at Your Peril,” *Daily Telegraph*, October 29, 2011.

¹⁸ “Damascus Bomb Kills at Least 11,” Reuters, November 5, 2012.

¹⁹ To this end, Alawite families were distributed in every corner of the country but because they lived in enclosed housing complexes, they rarely interacted with the local, often Sunni, population. Over decades, this absence of interaction bred suspicion and often contempt between the

it is from these projects that *shabiha* militiamen live with their families and from where campaigns against dissenting populations are planned and launched.

As such, more and more Alawite men, particularly those in and around Damascus and in districts shared with Syrians of other religions, will, out of fear, likely flood the ranks of the *shabiha* as the al-Assad regime nears its end. As a result, the *shabiha*’s activities may become more violent and widespread as rebels gain more ground on their way to confronting Assad-held Damascus.

The Syrian regime is running out of funds²⁰ and is losing territory to rebel forces.²¹ Although the full extent of the government’s losses in the north and east of the country have not yet been fully realized and accepted by the regime and its *shabiha* enforcers, their reaction to the news that rebel forces are at the gates of Damascus—whenever that happens—will likely see them turn increasingly violent against local Sunni populations. Areas within their reach and previously known for resistance to the regime are likely to suffer most, and Dariya-like massacres may well become commonplace in the time until rebel forces finally overthrow the al-Assad regime.

The quickening rate of violence now coloring the revolt-turned-war means groups like the *shabiha* will play an increasingly central role in conducting violence as law and order breaks down in the major cities. If and when rebels reach Damascus after having taken control of much of the rest of the country, the *shabiha*, making a last stand, will likely unleash ferocious reprisals on Sunni-dominated neighborhoods and regions.

powerful and the indigenous, powerless communities.

²⁰ The 2013 state budget deficit is expected to be 745bn SYP. See “People’s Assembly Listens to Government’s Financial Statement on General State Budget Bill for 2013 Fiscal Year,” Syrian Arab News Agency, November 4, 2012.

²¹ Khaled Yacoub Oweis, “Syrian Rebels Take Airbase in Slow Progress Toward Damascus,” Reuters, November 25, 2012.

The psychology that Syria is “Assad’s Syria,” a country ruled by Alawites, is so prevalent that pro-Assad militias are unlikely to be easily brought to a negotiating table. This is further complicated by the fact that there are no immediately obvious *shabiha* leaders who could bring the roving militias under control. Little is known of the *shabiha* leadership, where it exists today, but prominent figures are likely to be trusted relatives of powerful Alawite groups such as the Shalish, Makhlouf and Deeb families.²²

Once it becomes clear there is no future for the al-Assad regime, pro-government paramilitaries will likely flee Damascus and other mixed-religion areas around the country for the rural villages and towns of Qardaha, Shaykh Badr, Ain al-Tina and others in Syria’s coastal mountains—the Alawites’ ancestral home. Without what they perceive as protection, thousands of Alawite civilians may also migrate to these safe areas because of fear of retribution from rebels and Sunni civilians. Yet for *shabiha* gangs cut off from safe zones and unable to get to the mountains along the coast, bloody “last stand” scenarios may occur.

The arguments outlined in this article paint a grim future for Syrians and their country. Given the growing acceleration of violence²³ and the international community’s reluctance to get more directly involved in solution seeking, less bloody outcomes for Syria’s immediate future are scant. The violence will continue and likely worsen before the al-Assad regime leaves or is forced from power.

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Hizb Allah’s Role in the Syrian Uprising

By Chris Zambelis

AS THE CIVIL WAR in Syria rages on, there is ample evidence pointing to the activities of foreign interests—nation states and non-state actors—opposed to the Ba`athist regime in Damascus.¹ In contrast, recent reports implicating Lebanese Hizb Allah, an avowed Syrian ally, remain murky. Hizb Allah continues to refute charges that it is participating as an active belligerent in the civil war, even as it continues to lend political and moral support to the Syrian government. The deaths of Hizb Allah members in Syria in October 2012 coupled with reports of Hizb Allah activities in border regions along the Syrian-Lebanese frontier, however, have raised a new set of questions about Hizb Allah’s role in the conflict.²

This article evaluates the growing number of reports of Hizb Allah’s involvement in Syria and the geopolitical stakes involved for the group amid the ongoing turmoil. It also addresses Hizb Allah’s likely preparations for a post-Ba`athist Syria should the regime fall. The article finds that Hizb Allah’s involvement in Syria encompasses political, humanitarian, intelligence, and operational dimensions.

Rumors and Headlines

Since the start of the Syrian uprising, the political and militant components of the Syrian opposition have accused Hizb Allah of being actively involved in the Ba`athist regime’s violent crackdown against both peaceful and militant dissidents. A longtime ally of Syria, Hizb Allah has remained resolute in its support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad throughout the crisis. The prevailing geopolitical conditions dictate that Hizb Allah and Iran will work to ensure the al-Assad regime’s survival.³

1 Karen DeYoung and Liz Sly, “Syrian Rebels Get Influx of Arms with Gulf Neighbors’ Money, U.S. Coordination,” *Washington Post*, May 15, 2012.

2 Nicholas Blanford, “Accusations Mount of Hezbollah Fighting in Syria,” *Christian Science Monitor*, October 15, 2012.

3 Reports that pro-Ba`athist factions based in Iraq, in-

cluding numerous Shi`a militias, are operating in Syria on behalf of the Ba`athist regime are appearing with increasing frequency. See Suadad al-Salhy, “Iraqi Shi`ite Militias Fight for Syria’s Assad,” Reuters, October 16, 2012.

4 “Al Farouk Battalions: The Assassination of Hezbollah Representatives in Syria Ali Hussein Nassif,” available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHXcniwzVc.

5 “Hezbollah Military Commander ‘Killed in Syria,’” BBC, October 2, 2012.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Tulin Daloglu, “Turkey Held Hostage in Syria,” *al-Monitor*, October 23, 2012.

9 “Hezbollah Buries Fighter Killed in Syria ‘Border Area,’” *Daily Star* [Beirut], October 8, 2012.

22 David D. Kirkpatrick and Kareem Fahim, “Valued Relative and 2 Strong Loyalists Die in Damascus Attack,” *New York Times*, July 18, 2012; Salih.

23 David Kenner, “Syria is More Violent Than Iraq at its Worst,” *Foreign Policy*, September 11, 2012.

Allah members in combat.¹⁰ The Free Syrian Army (FSA) claims to have killed 60 Hizb Allah fighters in heavy clashes in Qusair in October that prompted Hizb Allah to request a truce to retrieve the bodies of their fallen comrades.¹¹ Members of the Syrian security forces and irregular paramilitary units known as the *shabiha* (ghosts) captured by FSA militants have issued statements while in captivity claiming that they had received training or direct orders by Hizb Allah and Iran.¹² The FSA also claimed to have detained 13 Hizb Allah members around the opposition stronghold city of Homs, in western Syria.¹³ FSA detachments also frequently showcase what they allege is evidence of some of the measures undertaken by Hizb Allah to navigate the battlefield, including its supposed reliance on using ambulances and other civilian vehicles.¹⁴ The FSA claims that Hizb Allah's presence in Syria numbers well in the thousands, an estimate that overstates the group's true membership.¹⁵ The FSA's abduction of

Hassan Salim al-Miqdad, a member of the prominent al-Miqdad clan centered in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon, in Syria in August adds another layer of intrigue to the Hizb Allah dynamic in Syria. Al-Miqdad's captors described him as a Hizb Allah member. This incident provoked a wave of retaliatory abductions of 20 Syrians and one Turk by al-Miqdad clan members in the southern outskirts of Beirut.¹⁶

A sober assessment of the claims repeated by the Syrian opposition regarding Hizb Allah's activities in Syria finds that many tend to be outlandish and exaggerated. Many

member of the FSA told the *Independent* that "thousands" of Hizb Allah fighters had entered Syria and were fighting as part of the Syrian security forces. He also added that he was able to distinguish between members of Hizb Allah and other Syrian soldiers due to the former's "combat skills" and use of "M16 assault rifles." See Loveday Morris, "Hezbollah Crosses Syrian Border with Bloody Assault on Assad's Enemies," *Independent*, October 26, 2012. While precise estimates of Hizb Allah's regular membership vary widely, its core paramilitary wing—excluding its numerous reserve and auxiliary units that are usually mobilized during conflict scenarios—is not likely to number more than a few thousand members. In this context, reports of Hizb Allah forces mobilizing in the hundreds or thousands in Syria as is often repeated by Syrian opposition sources should not be taken seriously. The FSA has an incentive to overestimate Hizb Allah's presence in Syria.

¹⁶ Hizb Allah has strongly denied any association with Hassan Salim al-Miqdad and the retaliatory abductions conducted in Dahiye by members of the al-Miqdad clan. Hizb Allah's political rivals in Lebanon accuse Hizb Allah of executing the abductions in concert with the al-Miqdad clan. It is widely accepted that Hizb Allah maintains friendly relations with many of the most influential tribes and clans in Lebanon, particularly the constellation of predominantly Shi'a families residing in the Bekaa Valley such as the al-Miqdads. The extent of Hizb Allah's relations with the al-Miqdads and other powerful clans whose influence in Lebanese society precedes Hizb Allah by generations does not, however, translate into a formal alliance, even though Hizb Allah's rise and influence could not have been realized without their support. Just as important, the interests of the al-Miqdads and Hizb Allah have been known to clash on many issues. For more details about the circumstances behind the wave of abductions in Syria and Lebanon described above and the complexities underlying Hizb Allah's interaction with the al-Miqdads and other important Lebanese clans, see Mona Harb and Lara Deeb, "Fissures in Hizballah's Edifice of Control," Middle East Research and Information Project, October 30, 2012. Also see Nour Samaha, "Meeting the Clans of Lebanon," al-Jazeera, August 18, 2012.

of these accounts appear crafted to achieve broader political goals aimed at undermining Hizb Allah's reputation and further weakening Syria. This tone of reporting also tends to misrepresent the true nature of Hizb Allah's role in the Syrian crisis.

The Resistance Responds

Hizb Allah has responded to the numerous allegations regarding its activities in Syria. While scoffing at claims that it is fighting alongside Syrian forces, Hizb Allah officials have issued public statements during the funeral ceremonies held for Nassif and other Hizb Allah members in their native Lebanon. Lauding their contributions to the organization, Hizb Allah officials described Nassif and others as having perished while "performing their jihadist duties."¹⁷

Hizb Allah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah elaborated on the circumstances surrounding Nassif's death and the growing reports of Hizb Allah activity in the vicinity of Qusair during a televised statement broadcast by al-Manar television on October 11. Nasrallah labeled the accusations that Hizb Allah has deployed thousands of operatives in Syria and that it is suffering major losses as lies. Underscoring the group's transparency in dealing with the crisis, he stressed that Hizb Allah has recognized its losses, as evidenced by the publicly held funerals for its fallen members.¹⁸ Nasrallah also rejected reports that Hizb Allah was participating in combat alongside the Ba`athist regime on account that its ally in Damascus did not request its assistance.¹⁹

Regarding the circumstances surrounding Nassif's death in Syria, Nasrallah offered an explanation that provides insight into Hizb Allah's broader approach to the Syrian crisis. He emphasized that members of Hizb Allah were present in 23 villages and 12 farms in the vicinity of Qusair, but only to protect the approximately 30,000 residents of Lebanese origin—Shi'a,

¹⁰ A Syrian army officer who defected relayed the following account: "With my own eyes I saw snipers on the top floors of buildings, Iranian snipers, Hezbollah people shooting at the people." See "More than 8,500 Syrian Refugees in Turkey," Agence France-Presse, June 14, 2011. Similarly, the commander of an FSA-affiliated detachment offered another firsthand testimony from the front: "They [Hizb Allah] were very professional and tough fighters. You can tell they are superior fighters from the way they move in battle and how they fight." See Nicholas Blanford, "Hezbollah Role in Syria Grows More Evident," *Daily Star*, October 12, 2012.

¹¹ Paula Astatih, "Syria: FSA Kill 60 Hezbollah Fighters, Retake Town," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 12, 2012.

¹² See "The Free Syrian Army Captured 13 of al-Assad's Thugs in Idlib Province in Syria 15.12.2011," available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=RnGpA5md6O8.

¹³ "FSA Threatens to Take Fight to Hezbollah Stronghold in Beirut," *Daily Star*, October 10, 2012.

¹⁴ "Free Syrian Army Captures Hezbollah Terror Ambulance Loaded with Weapons 11-13-11 Homs," November 23, 2011, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6u3P8OVrNU.

¹⁵ An al-Arabiya report claimed that 1,500 members of Hizb Allah are operating in Syria. This report was supposedly based on figures that were described as "leaked" Syrian security files. See "Over a Thousand Hezbollah Agents in Syria," al-Arabiya, October 7, 2012. Syrian opposition factions have similarly accused Iran of deploying members of its elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to suppress the protests. It is important to note that the veracity of these leaked documents has come under scrutiny, prompting al-Arabiya to issue a formal response. See Faisal J. Abbas, "An Apology on Behalf of Al Arabiya," al-Arabiya, October 13, 2012. A

¹⁷ "Lebanon's Hizballah Buries Fighters Killed in Syria," al-Jazeera, October 3, 2012.

¹⁸ "Transcript of Televised Speech by Hizballah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah," al-Manar, October 11, 2012.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Sunni, Christian, and Alawite—who reside there and have come under repeated attacks by the FSA. Nasrallah added that many of the region's residents have remained in Syria despite the conflict to protect their property. While located in Syrian territory, the residents of these villages identify as Lebanese, according to Nasrallah, with many maintaining familial links to communities in Lebanon's northern city of Hermel in the Bekaa Valley and surrounding areas. He stressed that while this patchwork of communities is diverse in its politics, many support or are involved in some capacity with Hizb Allah, including its military wing.²⁰ Nasrallah also refuted claims that Nassif served as a commander for Hizb Allah's Syria operations. Nassif's death, Nasrallah declared, stemmed from his activities supporting the besieged Lebanese communities inside Syria around Qusair.²¹

In light of its continued support for the al-Assad regime, Hizb Allah is mindful of its sensitive political position in Lebanon and reputation across the Middle East. As a result, Nasrallah's retort to the allegations surrounding Hizb Allah's activities in Syria was couched in a broader narrative of resistance—in this case, its defense of a besieged Lebanese population in Syria—it has honed over the years.²² Despite Nasrallah's claims, there is more to Hizb Allah's presence in Syria.

Evaluating the Evidence

Hizb Allah's stake in Syria cannot be understood without considering its place in Lebanese politics and wider geopolitical paradigms in the Middle East.²³ As a member of the Resistance

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Relatedly, Hizb Allah has also organized aid and relief efforts serving Syrian refugees and other affected populations, regardless of their political or religious identification, throughout Lebanon. See "Hizbullah's Mobile Health Clinics Help Syrian Refugees in Lebanon," Crescent International [Toronto], October 1, 2012.

²³ Most of the attention regarding the nature of Hizb Allah's involvement in Syria in support of the Ba`athist regime tends to focus on developments in Syria proper. Considering Lebanon's role in facilitating the insurgency in operational, logistical, financial, and personnel terms, it is likely that Hizb Allah is playing a larger than acknowledged role inside Lebanon on behalf of Syria. Hizb Allah and its allies are almost certainly gathering

Axis, an alliance that includes Syria and Iran, Hizb Allah is party to a larger regional competition between rival alliance blocs. The United States, Saudi Arabia and its Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) allies, and Israel, are positioned on one side against Iran, Syria, and Hizb Allah on the other. Saudi Arabia and Qatar, for example, have spearheaded efforts to organize the Syrian opposition to diminish Iran's regional influence by weakening its alliance network. In Lebanon, the Hizb Allah-led March 8 coalition, which includes the Amal Movement²⁴ and other political parties aligned with Syria, stands against the March 14 coalition, a U.S.- and Saudi-backed network of political parties that includes former Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri's Future Movement and Lebanon's Salafist current. In an attempt to strengthen its position in Lebanon and weaken its rival Hizb Allah, the March 14 coalition has thrown its support behind the Syrian opposition, inflaming political and sectarian tensions in Lebanon.²⁵

In this context, Nasrallah's admission of a limited Hizb Allah presence in Syria seems to correspond with the group's traditional thinking and approach. Hizb Allah has a strong interest in ensuring that the al-Assad regime remains in power. The potential fall of the Ba`athist regime would have a profound effect on Hizb Allah on many levels. In military terms, the possible loss of the strategic

valuable intelligence on the activities of insurgents on the Lebanese side of the Syrian-Lebanese border and conducting other activities to bolster the Ba`athist regime.

²⁴ The Amal movement also commands a wide following in the Lebanese Shi`a community.

²⁵ The crisis in Syria is inflaming sectarian tensions in Lebanon to such a degree that Lebanese Sunnis opposed to Hizb Allah and Syria, including hardline Salafists, are openly expressing a desire to organize professional and highly-capable militias based on the example of Hizb Allah. See Radwan Mortada, "Exclusive: The Man Behind Hariri's Secret Army," *al-Akbar* [Beirut], October 25, 2012. Also see Mohammed Zaatari, "Assir Says Suspends Plans for Military Wing," *Daily Star*, November 17, 2012. Members of the Future Movement are also ratcheting up political pressure against Hizb Allah by calling for a formal investigation into its activities relating to Syria. See "Judiciary to Probe Hezbollah's Involvement in Syrian Crisis," Lebanese National News Agency, October 9, 2012. Even the Free Syrian Army has threatened to target Hizb Allah in Beirut. See "FSA Threatens to Take Fight to Hezbollah Stronghold in Beirut," *Daily Star*, October 10, 2012.

depth Syrian territory has provided Hizb Allah over the years would, in theory, hamper its ability to operate. The geographic continuity between Lebanon and Syria affords Hizb Allah with a safety zone to operate outside of its Lebanese home. Syria also serves as a logistical land bridge for supplying Hizb Allah with arms and materiel and

"The potential fall of the Ba`athist regime would have a profound effect on Hizb Allah on many levels."

enabling training and other operational activities. Syria's alliance with Hizb Allah emboldens the latter's deterrence posture relative to Israel and its enemies in Lebanon. Syria's continued support for Hizb Allah also serves as a form of assurance for its allies—Muslim and Christian—in Lebanon's inherently turbulent body politic.²⁶

With the persistent turmoil that continues to shake Syria—raising the possibility of the replacement of the Ba`athist regime with one whose interests would be inimical to Hizb Allah—the prospects of a peaceful transition are remote. The al-Assad regime continues to enjoy support among a cross-section of Syrian society irrespective of religious confession and ethnicity and among millions who fear what a complete breakdown in order would entail. This reality foreshadows enduring violence and chaos, in essence a protracted civil war, should the Ba`athist regime collapse. In this regard, any post-Assad scenario will provide Hizb Allah and its allies inside Syria and around the region with the opportunity to countervail attempts by emergent forces to draw Syria away from its previous stance.

²⁶ The predominantly Christian Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) represents a key ally of Hizb Allah within the March 8 coalition. Hizb Allah has also been able to attract support among a broader segment of the Lebanese Christian community that views the group as a necessary bulwark against Israel.

The fall of the Ba`athist regime would certainly take Syria out of the Resistance Axis. This does not mean that Hizb Allah and its allies will stand idle. It is conceivable that Nasrallah's explanations for Hizb Allah's activities in Syria reflect this reality. A deployment of Hizb Allah operatives in strategically important areas along the Syrian-Lebanese border, especially in and around villages that are home to communities sympathetic to Hizb Allah or possibly the Ba`athist regime (or apolitical communities opposed to the FSA), ensures the group an operational foothold in Syria in any post-Assad scenario. A Hizb Allah presence in these areas also emboldens the Ba`athist regime, thereby allowing it to devote valuable military resources to other theaters. At the same time, Hizb Allah is also a relatively small organization that has worked hard over the years to foster its reputation as a Lebanese entity that exists to defend Lebanon against Israel. Hizb Allah, therefore, must be careful not to overextend itself in operational as well as political terms, especially as the Ba`athist regime continues to draw the international community's scorn.

Some predict that the potential collapse of its patron in Damascus will leave Hizb Allah irreparably weakened and vulnerable in the face of its numerous Lebanese and regional foes, especially Israel. Subscribers of this view, however, would be advised to revisit Hizb Allah's evolution over the years, specifically the period of tensions surrounding the "war of the camps" (1984-89) characterized by the years of open warfare between Hizb Allah and its present-day allies the Amal Movement and Syria during Lebanon's civil war (1975-1990).²⁷ Hizb Allah has long established itself as an organic Lebanese organization that is able to wield tremendous social, political, economic, and military functions in Lebanon. Hizb Allah will remain relevant in Lebanon and beyond should the Ba`athist regime fall.

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²⁷ Augustus Richard Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

Security Implications for Multinational Corporations Operating in Mexico

By Charles Regini

MEXICO IS A SIGNIFICANT economic and political player in Latin America. With the world's 13th largest economy, sharing a large common border with the United States and benefiting from extensive free trade agreements, Mexico has developed privileged access to U.S. markets and integration into U.S. supply chains. Iconic American manufacturers have moved factories by the dozens to Mexico, particularly to Mexico-U.S. border towns. Mexican factories are exporting record numbers of televisions, cars, computers, and appliances. Mexico continues to be viewed as a prime location for U.S. companies seeking to establish value-based, cost-effective, high return on investment business operations.

Drug wars and street battles, extreme violence, kidnapping, extortion, endemic public corruption, and the looming specter of spreading pockets of outright criminal organizational takeover of municipal governments are consistent headlines highlighting the ongoing challenges for business operations. Mexican federal authorities, however, point to continued successes in arresting or killing key criminal leaders and the break-up of transnational criminal organizations and Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs), as well as recent decreases in drug-related homicides. It is also a common belief that most of the violence in Mexico is due to drug gangs killing each other, or "bad on bad" murders. Multinational corporations continue to consider future investment, but have developed reservations and reluctance due to these concerns.

This article assesses the current security realities in Mexico, addressing the country's overall security environment and identifying specific primary security risks likely to be encountered by multinational corporations operating in Mexico, including extortion and kidnap-for-ransom schemes.

Government Control and Attacks on Authorities

Despite historical denials from the Mexican federal government, current media reporting and public opinion consistently discuss "fallen cities" or "ungoverned" communities in various areas of Mexico. These communities are characterized by a general lack of governmental authority. They arise due to pressure from direct attacks, assassinations, intimidation, and public corruption perpetrated by all of the various organized criminal groups. These groups seek to retaliate against Mexican security forces and support the continued expansion and activity of major DTOs in Mexican communities. In February 2012, in what was widely reported as a break from standard government media policy on this subject, Mexican Defense Secretary Guillermo Galvan Galva acknowledged that some areas of Mexico are no longer under government control. "Clearly, in some sectors of the country public security has been completely overrun," he admitted.¹ Galva said that organized crime has penetrated not only the country's public institutions, but Mexican society as well.²

While there is no general consensus of what constitutes an ungoverned or fallen city, several conditions should be considered when assessing security risks for business purposes. In fallen cities, any or all of the following conditions may be present: lacks a mayor, city council, or police department; cartel convoys travel openly in the city; cartels regularly operate roadblocks; street battles occur several times per month; large numbers of drug-related homicides, or businesses or citizens routinely pay extortion fees; and retaliatory attacks related to extortion attempts are common.

In the most extreme instances, these communities have no governmental authorities at all; they do not have mayors, city councils, judges, police departments, or other government officials. Residents and businesses in these communities have no protection from organized criminal groups who operate in the area, and criminals have

¹ Geoffrey Ramsey, "Mexico Official Admits Some Areas Out of Govt Control," *InSight Crime*, February 10, 2012.

² Ibid.

full run of the community and typically control access to it (e.g., roadblocks and surveillance).

In less extreme cases, municipalities may lack some elements of local government, but retain others. For example, they may lack mayors, city councils, chiefs of police, or even police departments, but they may have other governmental departments that function, such as public utilities, health services and schools. They are still able to provide basic municipal services, but in a limited form and one that is essentially controlled by organized criminal groups.

A third condition is also present where communities may have some or all elements of government, but they are largely ineffective in protecting residents from criminal activity due to corruption, collusion, intimidation, incompetence, or some combination thereof.

Due to variations in the level and type of criminal control over communities, and the fact that these levels are in flux over time, it is difficult to derive a definitive and current list of fallen cities in Mexico. Conditions change rapidly and a fairly stable community can quickly become ungoverned (often in a matter of weeks). In contrast, there have been instances where the conditions in ungoverned communities improved almost as quickly with the introduction of federal forces, such as the police or military. Several cities that exhibit a continuing pattern of security deterioration and indicators of fallen or ungoverned would be Apatzingan (Michoacan State); Ciudad Altamirano (Guerrero State); Coyuca de Benitez (Guerrero State); Meoqui (Chihuahua State); and Piedras Negras (Coahuila State).

Several municipalities that have had conditions improve with continued deployment and use of military forces against organized crime elements are Ciudad Juarez and Nuevo Laredo on the northern border. Although neither city can be considered “safe” and under complete control of legitimate Mexican authorities not influenced or intimidated by criminal elements, there have been clear indications of authorities regaining control and

improving the security conditions in what were once considered lawless and uncontrolled cities.

Overall, however, evidence suggests that organized crime has increased its control over Mexican cities in the past decade. Research completed by the Institute of Citizens’ Action for Justice and Democracy (IAC) shows that organized crime’s control over

“Overall, evidence suggests that organized crime has increased its control over Mexican cities in the past decade.”

Mexican municipalities has gone from 34% in 2001, to 53% in 2006, to 71.5% in 2011.³ The president of IAC stated that the infrastructure of organized crime in Mexico is “apparent, open, and notorious,” and that in many cases there is complicity between political leaders and these groups.⁴

Contributing to the deterioration of government control for security of business operations are the daily attacks on government authorities that plague more than half of the Mexican states. Government officials are the target of daily attacks perpetrated by organized criminal groups in many areas of the country. The attacks include ambushes of police or military patrols, attacks on government buildings such as police stations, courts and municipal buildings, assassinations of political figures, and executions or kidnap-executions of police officers. These attacks are in contrast to street battles between government forces and *sicarios* (cartel gunmen).

The frequency and character of armed attacks directed against Mexican authorities provide insight on the ability of the Mexican government to combat organized crime and maintain

3 The IAC did not define how they measure “control.” See “Mexico: Situation of Organized Crime; Police and State Response Including Effectiveness; Availability of Witness Protection,” Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, September 11, 2012.
4 Ibid.

control. The number of police officers killed during ambushes jumped from approximately 625 in 2010 to 817 in 2011, a 130% increase.⁵ The number of assassinations dropped 8% in 2011, although that number remains quite high at approximately 125 for the year.⁶ In most instances, the victims were municipal level government officials, followed by state level officials.⁷

Since January 2010, there has been a steady increase in not only the numbers of attacks on government authorities, but also a spread in the geographic pattern of attacks. In 2010, there were an average of 15 Mexican states per month experiencing attacks on government authorities.⁸ In 2011, the average increased to 18.⁹ For most of 2012, the number of states with attacks on government authorities was 20.¹⁰ States most recently hit hardest by attacks on authorities have been Chihuahua, Coahuila, Guerrero, and Michoacan.

There has been a steady increase in the number of monthly attacks since January 2010.¹¹ Attacks on Mexican security forces occur on a daily basis throughout most of the country. The families of elected officials are also routinely targeted. Data from 2010-2012 reveals an increase in ambushes since January 2010.¹² Although the pattern of political assassinations from January 2010 to July 2012 suggests they are decreasing, political leaders and government officials remain routine targets of Mexican organized crime and drug trafficking groups, with an average of five to 10 assassinations of elected officials in the first seven months of 2012.¹³ These statistics suggest continued challenges by Mexican authorities to maintain control of many areas of the country.

5 “Mexico Annual Security Review 2011,” Harary Security Consulting, 2012.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 “Mexico Monthly Security Summaries in 2010, 2011, and 2012,” Harary Security Consulting, 2012.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 “Mexico Annual Security Review 2011.”

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

Another useful variable in assessing government control and the level of security risk to business operations in Mexico is the number of street battles or firefights between Mexican authorities and cartel gunmen.¹⁴ There has been a continuing increase in the number

“States most recently hit hardest by attacks on authorities have been Chihuahua, Coahuila, Guerrero, and Michoacan.”

of such battles during the first seven months of 2012. In January 2012, there were approximately 25 street battles, with the number rising to 67 in April.¹⁵ In July, the number of street battles reached 71.¹⁶

There has also been a slight increase in the geographic dispersion of these battles; they appear to be taking place across a larger number of cities and states. This pattern, which might not yet reflect a fixed trend, may still indicate a geographic expansion of threats to public safety and business operations.

In addition to the number and geographic pattern of ungoverned cities, attacks on authorities and street battles, other variables provide insight into the current security risks to business facilities, personnel, and operations. These include violent criminal activities such as extortion, kidnapping, and cargo theft. Reliable statistics do not exist on any of these crimes, but media reports and releases by various human rights organizations and think-tanks suggest an increase and spread in each of them.¹⁷ Certainly, the

continuing decline in the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies in many areas of the country due to direct attacks, assassinations, intimidation, corruption, poor training, lack of equipment, and weak leadership contribute to the increase and spread of these crimes. As a result, opportunistic, small-scale criminals take advantage of the disorder in local communities as well. Burglary and theft, armed robberies, kidnapping, and extortion all tend to increase as law enforcement personnel direct their attention to more significant matters, including their very own survival.

Extortion

Since 2008, extortion in Mexico has increased and spread across the country. The National Citizens' Observatory, an organization that compiles statistics on crime, calculated that Mexico extortion cases of both nationals and foreign nationals have increased more than 180% since 2006.¹⁸ A 2011 study by the Bank of Mexico found that more than 60% of Mexican businesses reported that they were victims of crimes such as extortion.¹⁹ One of the deadliest attacks on a private sector business during the recent drug violence came as a result of extortion. In August 2011, gunmen reportedly working for the Los Zetas cartel set fire to a casino in Monterrey because its owners refused to pay them protection money.²⁰ The fire killed 52 innocent civilian customers and employees, most of whom were middle-aged and elderly women who came to the casino to play bingo.

Extortion has spread to businesses in areas of the country previously considered largely untouched by crime. The state of Quintana Roo, which is home to the popular

tourist cities of Cancun and Playa del Carmen, has now started to experience business extortions. A local newspaper reported in 2011 that the Los Zetas drug cartel was gradually infiltrating businesses throughout the region, including businesses that work with the tourism industry. Quintana Roo trade associations have reported that an increasing number of businesses are simply closing down, in large part due to the ongoing threat of extortion and other organized criminal activity. The trade groups claimed that 70 businesses closed in 2009, 120 in 2010, and 300 in 2011.²¹ A government official in the city of Playa del Carmen told the local newspaper *Por Esto* that reported extortion threats against local businesses jumped 150% in 2011.²² He further said about 99% of the businesses along one main commercial street in the city were paying protection fees to cartels.²³

The cities along the dangerous U.S.-Mexico border are also major business extortion areas. Most extortion attempts here, as well as elsewhere in Mexico, seem largely directed at small, more vulnerable local Mexican companies that cannot afford to invest in adequate risk and security mitigation and management measures.

While most extortion attempts are directed at local companies, there have been increasing incidents targeting large multinational corporations. One of the most well-known potential extortion cases affecting a multinational business occurred in late May 2012 against the Mexican subsidiary of Pepsico snack and beverage company, Sabritas. The attack was viewed as the worst attack on a multinational company in Mexico in recent years. Members of the Knights Templar, an offshoot of the La Familia cartel, set fire to warehouses and more than 30 trucks belonging to the firm in Guanajuato and Michoacan states.²⁴ In total, the attacks and fires at five

14 The majority of these conflicts are running street battles during which bullets are fired indiscriminately in mostly urban settings often resulting in the injury or death of innocent bystanders. Fragmentation grenades were also used in a significant number of these battles resulting in injuries to innocent bystanders and property damage.

15 “Mexico Annual Security Review 2011.”

16 Ibid.

17 “Mexico’s 2012 National Survey on Victimization and Perception of Public Security,” Mexican National Institute of Statistics and Geography, 2012; Luisa

Blanco, *The Impact of Reform on the Criminal Justice System in Mexico* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2012); Gary J. Hale, *A ‘Failed State’ in Mexico: Tamaulipas Declares Itself Ungovernable* (Houston: James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy, 2011); “Security and Criminal Justice in the States: 25 Indicators of our Institutional Weakness,” Mexico Evalua, 2012.

18 Tracey Wilkenson, “In Mexico, Extortion is a Booming Offshoot of Drug War,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 18, 2012.

19 Ibid.

20 Daniel Hernandez, “Who is Responsible for the Casino Tragedy in Mexico?” *Los Angeles Times*, August 29, 2011.

21 Edward V. Byrne, “300 Businesses Close in Cancun, Riviera Maya Due to 2011 Narco Extortion, Threats,” Mexico and Gulf Region Reporter, December 24, 2011.

22 “El crimen organizado expande su radio de acción,” *Por Esto*, October 24, 2011.

23 Ibid.

24 “Sabritas Target of a String of Attacks in Mexico,” CNN, June 2, 2012.

distribution centers across the two states significantly damaged company infrastructure, trucks and goods. In most media reports, the criminal organization claimed the attack was due to the company's cooperation with authorities, however the circumstances point to indications of attempted extortion.²⁵ The attacks required significant coordination to hit multiple locations and inflict a tremendous amount of damage without causing any loss of life. Arson is a common method of intimidation and retaliation in attempted extortions.²⁶

The mining industry in particular has become a popular target for extortionists, mostly because the industry is highly profitable and the work sites are remote. According to Mexico's Attorney General's Office, drug cartels commonly pressure multinational mining companies to pay from \$11,000 to \$37,000 a month in "taxes" for the right to operate in the cartel's territory.²⁷ If the "security tax" is not paid, the company's directors, family members, and the miners themselves are attacked or kidnapped. The Attorney General's Office has opened 12 investigations into extortion threats faced by some 300 mines across the country and has created an inter-agency investigative team aimed at protecting the mining industry in response to the rise in extortion.

In one example, a multinational mining company in Reynosa reported in August 2012 that it had received several threats from unknown individuals who demanded that they be permitted to steal copper from a warehouse owned by the company.²⁸

Separately, in August 2011, two miners of a multinational mining company were intercepted on a road near their mining facility in a remote area of Chihuahua State by a group of 12-14 men in bulletproof vests, carrying automatic weapons, with bandanas over their faces. The two miners were blindfolded, handcuffed, and transported to the group's operating "base." They were taken on a short tour of the location and shown a roomful of automatic weapons, grenade launchers, and explosives. A laptop with the company's website loaded on the internet browser was also shown to the men. The assailants told the miners how the company's website bragged about the successes of the Chihuahua gold mining operation and that to continue the operation the company would be required to pay a monthly "tax" to the group.²⁹

Kidnap-for-Ransom

Mexico is among the top five countries at risk for kidnap-for-ransom schemes. The Mexican government's statistical information about kidnap-for-ransom is highly inaccurate and likely manipulated for perception purposes. The reality is that the exact numbers of incidents, types of victims, or average ransom demands are nearly impossible to accurately determine because only a fraction of incidents are reported to authorities or other organizations. This is mostly due to fear that corrupt local and state police officers collude with kidnapers.

A Mexican human rights group, the Council for Law and Human Rights, claimed that 17,889 kidnappings occurred in 2011, up approximately 32% from the 13,505 abductions in 2010.³⁰ The figures did not include kidnappings where the victim was released within 24 hours, known as an "express kidnapping." In 2011, a separate Mexican think-tank reported that 1,847 kidnappings were recorded in the country in 2010. Some 209 of these incidents resulted in the death of the hostage.³¹ The think-tank, however, admitted these figures were likely only a fragment of the real kidnapping rate due to underreporting

and the manipulation of statistical data by local governments. The think-tank's 2010 figure was twice its 2009 numbers. Meanwhile, between October 2010 and September 2011 there were 1,016 incidents of kidnap-for-ransom, as noted in a report by the National Public Security System.³² According to a 2011 Mexican congressional report, kidnapping in Mexico has risen 317% in

“Drug cartels commonly pressure multinational mining companies to pay from \$11,000 to \$37,000 a month in ‘taxes’ for the right to operate in the cartel’s territory.”

the last five years.³³ The report estimated an average of 3.72 kidnap cases are reported every day. Although kidnap-for-ransom incidents occur throughout the country, high numbers of incidents are concentrated in eight states: Mexico, the Federal District, Guanajuato, Michoacan, Guerrero, Chihuahua, Baja California and Tamaulipas. Other primary trouble spots include Nuevo Leon, Tabasco, and Veracruz states. The municipalities in the Yucatan Peninsula seem relatively less prone to kidnap incidents.³⁴

Kidnap groups in Mexico range from well-organized and professional kidnapping rings and drug cartels to opportunistic street criminals. Both types of groups generally operate in urban areas or along rural highways. These groups often kidnap employees commuting to and from work, or in transit from city to city. Mexican nationals are believed to make up the vast majority of victims, but foreigners are also targeted. Although all business sectors are victimized, energy and mining sector workers are particularly at risk due to their isolated and rural work sites and transportation routes.

25 "Arson Attacks Against U.S. Multinational Subsidiary," U.S. Overseas Security Advisory Council, 2012.

26 The criminal organization claiming responsibility for the arson attack was the Knights Templar, a relatively small splinter criminal group of the La Familia cartel that routinely relies on extortion revenues, unlike the larger cartels that primarily rely on drug trafficking revenues.

27 Edward Fox, "Mexico Mining Ops Pay Hefty Extortion Fees to Cartels," *Insight Crime*, May 8, 2012.

28 Charles Regini, "Kroll Critical Incident Case Studies and Statistics," Kroll Associates, 2012.

29 Ibid.

30 "49 Kidnappings Per Day Occurred in Mexico in 2011," *Borderland Beat*, January 2, 2012.

31 Elyssa Pachico, "Study: 2010 Record Year for Kidnappings in Mexico," *Insight Crime*, February 7, 2011.

32 Ioan Grillo, "No Reduction in Mexico Kidnappings," *Global Post*, November 20, 2011.

33 Damien Cave, "In Mexico, a Kidnapping Ignored as Crime Worsens," *New York Times*, March 17, 2012.

34 There is not one definitive reason why the Yucatan Peninsula is less prone to kidnap incidents.

Drug trafficking gangs, such as Los Zetas, La Familia, and the Knights Templar, engage in retaliation and intimidation kidnappings against rivals, government authorities, public officials and private sector companies. They also kidnap-for-ransom employees and managers of successful high profile businesses and multinational corporations to boost their finances. While the vast majority of ransoms are relatively small, high profile senior managers and executives of multinational firms and local Mexican citizen business owners can fetch ransoms in the millions of dollars. A U.S. businessman abducted in Tijuana drew \$5 million in 2011.³⁵

In most cases, after the ransom is paid, the victim is safely set free. Kidnappings in Mexico are rarely investigated or prosecuted due to a lack of adequate resources, as well as corruption and competence issues. In addition to traditional kidnap-for-ransom operations, there are a number of other kidnapping methods used in Mexico, including:

Express Kidnapping: Abduction based on a 24-hour time limit with emphasis placed on forcing victims to withdraw funds from a number of ATMs, as well as handover cash, valuables, and other possessions. In other cases, the victims are quickly released after paying a small ransom.

Virtual Kidnapping: Criminals call their victims from unregistered mobile phones and claim to have kidnapped a family member or friend. These criminals may use sound effects or information gathered on the internet to convince a victim that a kidnapping has occurred. The criminal then demands a ransom. Criminals often claim to be members of one of the large drug cartels when making such calls, knowing these groups' reputation for brutality will scare victims. These incidents are actually elaborate extortion attempts since no one is actually kidnapped.

Since extortion and kidnapping are closely linked to the drug trade and the ungoverned municipalities and unsecured areas of the country, the cartels' ability to operate with

impunity have left businesses and their employees, managers, and executives vulnerable. This has resulted in significant economic and social damage, as well as scaring away some businesses looking to invest in Mexico.

A 2011-2012 survey by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Mexico found that 87% of the surveyed companies had increased security measures or contacted authorities due to incidents of extortion or kidnapping, and more than half of the companies increased their investments in security during 2011.³⁶ A June 2012 article in the *Financial Times*, however, reported a more optimistic scenario; foreign direct investment totaled \$18 billion in 2011 and was expected to reach similar levels in 2012. While extortion and kidnapping affects multinational corporations, in most cases criminals rarely know which key leaders to kidnap due to the sheer size of many companies operating in Mexico. In fact, in many incidents involving employees or managers of multinational corporations, the threat and demand are directed toward the families and not the companies, although most multinational corporations do accept varying levels of ownership of the incident and associated support and assistance to the victim's family. The prospects for smaller, local companies may be darker. Many small Mexican businesses close rather than face the continued threat of violence, kidnapping, or ever-increasing extortion payments to gangs or cartels.

Conclusion

The security environment for businesses in Mexico will see no significant overall change for many years to come. Crime, corruption, and the resulting insecurity for business operations, employees, and executives will remain a consistent risk for business. Real change will require the Mexican government to radically reduce the corruption within law enforcement and significantly restructure the criminal justice system.

Businesses considering future operations or maintaining current operations in Mexico must acknowledge and take steps to actively manage these security risks to be successful and profitable. Regardless of the severity, business security risks can be managed using a continuous and systematic risk assessment and mitigation process. Access to and use of current continuous intelligence reporting on the evolving threat environment and how a Mexico-based business' employees, facilities, operations, and supply chain may be vulnerable to security risks is the first step to developing and implementing effective security practices and policies.

Although Mexico will remain dangerous for the foreseeable future, multinational companies operating there can limit the frequency and severity of security related incidents through implementing a successful operational risk management program.

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³⁶ "The Impact of Security in Mexico on the Private Sector (Fourth Edition)," American Chamber of Commerce of Mexico, 2011.

³⁵ Regini.

Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

October 1, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber attacked a joint NATO-Afghan patrol in Khost, killing at least 14 people. Three of the dead were U.S. soldiers. The Taliban claimed responsibility. – *Voice of America, October 1*

October 1, 2012 (IRAQ): The Iraqi government announced that 365 people were killed in militant attacks in September, the highest number of monthly deaths in more than two years. According to the figures, 182 civilians, 95 soldiers and 88 policemen were killed during the month. – *Reuters, October 1*

October 1, 2012 (KENYA): Suspected al-Shabab militants hurled a grenade at a Kenyan police post in Garissa, close to the Kenya-Somalia border. There were no casualties. – *Reuters, October 1*

October 4, 2012 (YEMEN): The U.S. State Department officially identified Ansar al-Shari`a in Yemen as an alias of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). According to the statement, Ansar al-Shari`a “is simply AQAP’s effort to rebrand itself, with the aim of manipulating people to join AQAP’s terrorist cause.” – *Wall Street Journal, October 4; U.S. State Department, October 4*

October 4, 2012 (YEMEN): Three U.S. drone strikes killed five suspected members of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula in Shabwa Province. – *CNN, October 4*

October 8, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle attacked an Afghan police station in Lashkar Gah, Helmand Province. The explosion killed at least two Afghan intelligence agents. – *AFP, October 8*

October 8, 2012 (SYRIA): A suicide bomber detonated a car bomb near Syria’s Air Force Intelligence compound on the outskirts of Damascus. Jabhat al-Nusra claimed responsibility, and said that the attack involved two car bombs. – *AP, October 8; BBC, October 9*

October 8, 2012 (YEMEN): Yemeni authorities arrested a U.S. citizen at a hotel in Shabwa Province on suspicions

of having links to al-Qa`ida. The man was carrying two U.S. passports as well as a German passport. – *AP, October 13*

October 9, 2012 (UNITED STATES): Abu Hamza al-Masri, an Islamic cleric charged with aiding al-Qa`ida, was arraigned in a U.S. court after eight years of fighting extradition from the United Kingdom. – *Bloomberg, October 9*

October 9, 2012 (PAKISTAN): Taliban militants shot a 14-year-old female student activist in the head while she was on her way home from school in Mingora, located in the Swat Valley. A spokesman for Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan claimed responsibility, and said that the girl, Malala Yousafzai, “has become a symbol of Western culture in the area.” Yousafzai survived the attack, but is in critical condition. According to many press reports, Pakistanis were shocked over the incident. – *New York Times, October 10; Voice of America, October 10*

October 10, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A U.S. drone killed five suspected insurgents at a compound in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *AAP, October 12*

October 11, 2012 (YEMEN): Masked gunmen shot to death a Yemeni security official who worked at the U.S. Embassy in Sana`a. The official, Qassim Aklan, had “worked for the U.S. Embassy for almost 20 years and had been involved in investigating the storming of the U.S. Embassy compound by protestors last month,” said a report from *USA Today*. He was killed when two men on a motorcycle opened fire on his vehicle. – *New York Times, October 11; USA Today, October 11*

October 11, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A U.S. drone killed 18 suspected insurgents at a militant compound in Orakzai Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Most of the dead were reportedly Afghans. – *AAP, October 12*

October 12, 2012 (SYRIA): Rebel fighters seized a government missile defense base near Aleppo in northern Syria. Among the rebels included members of Jabhat al-Nusra, a Salafi-jihadi group. – *CBS News, October 12*

October 12, 2012 (ALGERIA): Algerian troops reportedly killed Boualem Bekai, also known as Khaled al-Mig, near Tizi Ouzou. Bekai was considered the number two in al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb. – *BBC, October 15*

October 13, 2012 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new audiotape urging Muslims to wage holy war against the United States and Israel due to the film *Innocence of Muslims* that portrays the Prophet Muhammad in a highly negative light. – *AFP, October 13*

October 13, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber on a motorbike targeted a local intelligence office in Maruf district of Kandahar Province, killing at least nine people. Two of the dead were Americans. The Taliban claimed responsibility. It was later revealed that the bomber was an Afghan intelligence agent who had worked at the agency for eight years. The bomber had moved his wife and children to Pakistan a week before he attacked the facility. – *AP, October 13; AFP, October 16*

October 13, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle killed at least 14 people near an arms bazaar in Darra Adam Khel in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. – *Reuters, October 13; New York Times, October 13*

October 13, 2012 (ISRAEL): Israel killed Hisham Saidani, an influential Salafi-jihadi, in an airstrike in the Gaza Strip. Saidani was killed along with one other top militant. As stated by the Associated Press, “In recent years, a number of shadowy groups that claim inspiration from al-Qaida have been on the rise in Gaza. While they are not believed to have direct links with the global terror network [al-Qa`ida], they share the same belief that they can impose their fundamentalist version of Islam by force and frequently borrow its tactics. They have also clashed with Gaza’s ruling Islamic militant Hamas movement.” – *AP, October 14*

October 14, 2012 (NORTH AFRICA): Abdelmalek Droukdel, the leader of al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), reportedly appointed Yahya Abou El Hamame as *amir* of the Sahel. El Hamame, whose real name is reportedly Djamel Okacha, will replace Nabil Makhloufi, who is believed to have died

in a car accident in September 2012. – *AFP, October 15*

October 15, 2012 (IRAQ): Gunmen attacked a checkpoint in the town center of Tuz Khurmatu, killing two policemen. – *AFP, October 15*

October 16, 2012 (UNITED STATES): A U.S. appeals court overturned the conviction of Salim Hamdan, Usama bin Ladin's former driver and bodyguard, concluding that "providing support for terrorism was not a war crime at the time of Hamdan's alleged conduct from 1996 to 2001 and therefore could not support a conviction," according to Reuters. Hamdan, who was convicted in 2008 while at Guantanamo Bay, was returned to Yemen in November 2008. Yemen freed him in January 2009 to live with his family in Sana'a. – *Reuters, October 16*

October 16, 2012 (YEMEN): A suicide bomber and other militants killed six Yemeni militiamen during an attack on a checkpoint in Abyan Province. – *AFP, October 16*

October 17, 2012 (UNITED STATES): The Federal Bureau of Investigation arrested a Bangladeshi national living in Jamaica, Queens, for plotting to blow up the Federal Reserve Bank in Lower Manhattan. The suspect, identified as 21-year-old Quazi Mohammad Rezwanul Ahsan Nafis, tried to detonate by cell phone an inert 1,000-pound bomb that he parked next to the Federal Reserve on Liberty Street. An undercover FBI agent had provided him with the non-functioning bomb. Nafis described Usama bin Ladin as "our beloved sheikh." – *New York Daily News, October 17*

October 17, 2012 (UNITED STATES): The U.S. Treasury Department announced that it froze the assets of three Pakistan-based individuals accused of supporting the Taliban and other militant groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The three were identified as Maulawi Adam Khan Achekzai, Aamir Ali Chaudhry and Qari Ayyub Bashir. – *Reuters, October 17*

October 17, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber drove an explosives-laden vehicle into a joint U.S.-Afghan base in Zurmat district of Paktia Province. At least 45 Afghan soldiers

were wounded. The Taliban claimed responsibility. – *Reuters, October 17*

October 18, 2012 (NIGERIA): According to Reuters, "A senior member of the Islamist sect Boko Haram has been arrested at the home of a senator in the group's stronghold in northeastern Nigeria...adding to evidence that the group has ties to government officials." – *Reuters, October 20*

October 18, 2012 (YEMEN): A U.S. drone killed at least nine suspected militants who were preparing to attack Yemeni troops in Abyan Province. – *New York Times, October 18*

October 19, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A roadside bomb killed at least 19 people on their way to a wedding in Balkh Province. Most of the dead were women and children. – *Reuters, October 19*

October 19, 2012 (YEMEN): Al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) militants killed 16 Yemeni soldiers during an attack on an army base in Shuqra, Abyan Province. According to Reuters, "Two militants disguised in army uniforms drove an explosives-laden car into the military base...moments later, other militants assaulted the base from the sea and a fierce battle ensued." – *Reuters, October 19*

October 19, 2012 (IRAN): A suicide bomber targeted a Shi'a mosque in Sistan-Baluchistan Province, killing two Basij militiamen. – *AFP, October 19*

October 20, 2012 (NORTH AFRICA): A leader of al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb warned France against attempting to rescue six French hostages. – *Reuters, October 20*

October 21, 2012 (JORDAN): Jordanian authorities announced that they arrested 11 suspected al-Qa`ida-linked militants who were allegedly plotting to attack shopping malls and Western diplomatic missions in the country. – *CBS News, October 21*

October 21, 2012 (YEMEN): A U.S. drone killed four suspected militants from al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula in Marib Province. – *Voice of America, October 21*

October 21, 2012 (YEMEN): Said al-Shihri, second-in-command of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula, released a new audiotape rejecting reports of his death. – *Reuters, October 22*

October 22, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban militants killed 10 Afghan troops in an ambush in Herat Province. – *AP, October 23*

October 23, 2012 (IRAQ): A series of attacks targeted Shi'a neighborhoods in Baghdad, killing nine people. – *AP, October 23*

October 23, 2012 (RUSSIA): A suicide bomber in a vehicle attacked a police checkpoint in Russia's North Caucasus region, killing a policeman. The incident occurred between the province of North Ossetia and Ingushetia. – *Reuters, October 23*

October 24, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A group of Taliban militants reportedly attacked a village bazaar in Faryab Province. Afghan forces, however, managed to kill 24 of the militants, as well as their commander, who has been identified as the Taliban shadow governor for Faryab Province. Five policemen were killed. – *AFP, October 25*

October 25, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A man wearing an Afghan National Police uniform killed two U.S. Special Operations troops in Uruzgan Province. – *Voice of America, October 25*

October 26, 2012 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new video message criticizing U.S. President Barack Obama, demanding that he admit defeat in Iraq, Afghanistan and North Africa. Al-Zawahiri also called on Muslims to kidnap Westerners. – *AFP, October 26*

October 26, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber killed at least 40 people in a mosque in Faryab Province. – *Reuters, October 26*

October 28, 2012 (KENYA): Kenyan police shot to death a Muslim cleric accused of having ties to al-Shabab. The cleric, Omar Faraj, was killed after police burst into his home in Mombasa's Majengo district. Authorities did not provide further details about the incident. – *Reuters, October 28*

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

October 28, 2012 (SOMALIA): Al-Shabab militants killed General Mohamed Ibrahim Farah, a top Somali military commander. The general was ambushed near the strategic town of Merka. – *BBC, October 29*

October 28, 2012 (NIGERIA): A suicide bomber detonated an explosives-laden vehicle at a Catholic church in Kaduna, killing at least seven people. – *BBC, October 28*

October 28, 2012 (YEMEN): A suspected U.S. drone killed four al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula militants in Sa`da Province. – *Reuters, October 28*

October 30, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A man in an Afghan police uniform killed two NATO service members in southern Afghanistan. – *AP, October 30*