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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 Risk of Non-State Actors Acquiring Chemical Weapons in Syria

By Stephen Hummel



A UN arms expert collects samples during an investigation into a suspected chemical weapons strike in Damascus. - AFP/Getty Images

THE POWER OF nuclear, chemical and biological weapons—all considered weapons of mass destruction (WMD)—does not necessarily rest solely in their destructiveness, but rather in the anxiety and fear that they create. WMDs can range from extremely complex weapons systems, where a high level of expertise is needed, to relatively unsophisticated munitions where only a minimal amount of scientific knowledge is required to create and employ them.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which works with the United Nations, was established in The Hague, Netherlands, in 1997 to ensure that chemical weapon (CW) stockpiles are destroyed and that CW precursors are tracked and monitored to prevent the rogue development of CWs. Although there

are currently 189 member-states in the OPCW, Syria is not one of them. Syria deliberately chose not to join the OPCW and has not been held accountable for its CW arsenal in the past 16 years. As a result, the international community can only estimate the state and quantities of Syria's CW stockpiles.

The U.S. government and other Western states have accused the Bashar al-Assad regime of using CWs against rebel forces and civilians in multiple incidents during the past six months, with the deadliest attack occurring in August 2013.¹ The Syrian government, however, has denied

¹ Dana Hughes, Z. Byron Wolf, and Mary Bruce, "US Confirms Syrian Government Used Chemical Weapons," ABC News, June 13, 2013; Ben Hubbard, "Signs of Chemical Attack Detailed by Aid Group," *New York Times*, August 24, 2013.

these allegations.² Russia, a Syrian ally, has claimed that Syrian rebels are to blame for the August CW attack.³ These disputes raise questions about the security of CW stockpiles, and there is concern that non-state actors could acquire CWs in Syria.⁴

This article explores the CW dynamic of the Syrian civil war and the potential for non-state actors to acquire or employ these weapons. It finds that there is a risk, albeit an unlikely one, that non-state actors could gain control over a limited number of CWs in Syria. Yet the successful employment of CWs would prove difficult for a small terrorist organization.

Syria's Porous Borders

The massive exodus of 1.5 million refugees from Syria during the course of the past two years is not only a humanitarian crisis but an illustration of Syria's porous, uncontrolled

borders.⁵ According to sources cited in the *New York Times*, U.S. counterterrorism officials estimate that there are more than 6,000 foreign fighters in rebel groups in Syria.⁶ Foreign fighters from countries such as the United Kingdom, Sweden, Jordan and Pakistan have moved across Syria's weak borders to join jihadist rebel groups, some of which are associated with al-Qa`ida.⁷ Clearly, Syria has become a popular training ground for jihadist militants.

Abu Omar, a commander for al-Qa`ida's Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), highlighted in an interview that the goals of his movement extend beyond Syria's borders.⁸ He threatened Russia, and he talked of the broad-based fight against Shi`a Iran and its strategy to dominate the region.⁹ According to Omar, Sunnis from around the world are justified in traveling to Syria to fight with the rebels because the Syrian regime is deploying Shi`a fighters from Lebanon and Iraq.¹⁰ Other groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra, which also has ties to al-Qa`ida, have been identified as fighting alongside mainstream fighters who identify themselves with the Free Syrian Army (FSA).¹¹

Abu Omar's comments reveal the paradox of the Syrian civil war and the role of foreign fighters. The al-Assad government is bolstered by Lebanese Hizb Allah while the ranks of the FSA include some fighters whose allegiance is solely to Sunni Muslims, rather than to nationalist or democratic ideals. For those like the ISIL's Abu Omar, the civil war in Syria is a sectarian war pitting Sunni Muslims against regime Alawites and their Shi`a Muslim backers in Iran and Hizb Allah.

This illustrates why Syria's porous borders represent a threat to the region. The Syrian border is regularly crossed by fleeing refugees, rebel fighters and pro-Assad non-state actors. Shi`a Hizb Allah, for example, has crossed into

“There is a risk, albeit an unlikely one, that non-state actors could gain control over a limited number of CWs in Syria. Yet the successful employment of CWs would prove difficult for a small terrorist organization.”

Syria from Lebanon and has fought for the al-Assad regime, particularly in the town of Qusayr in Homs Province.¹² Westerners and other Sunni foreign fighters have entered Syria—probably from Turkey—to fight with jihadist groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra, the ISIL or Jund al-Sham.¹³

Weak border security also raises the concern that CWs—if acquired by non-state actors—could be smuggled out of Syria and employed against regional targets or Western interests.

2 Hubbard.

3 “UN Chemical Weapons Inspectors to Visit Syrian Sites,” BBC, July 31, 2013.

4 In September 2013, U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel warned, “The Syrian regime’s use of chemical weapons poses grave risks to our friends and partners along Syria’s borders including Israel, Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq. If Assad is prepared to use chemical weapons against his own people, we have to be concerned that terrorist groups like Hezbollah, which has forces in Syria supporting the Assad regime, could acquire and would use them. That risk of chemical weapons proliferation poses a direct threat to our friends and partners, and to U.S. personnel in the region. We cannot afford for Hezbollah or any terrorist group determined to strike the United States to have incentives to acquire or use chemical weapons.” For his full statement, see Chuck Hagel, “Statement on Syria Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee,” U.S. Department of Defense, September 3, 2013. In March 2013, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper testified before Congress that the intelligence community is concerned that “nongovernmental groups or individuals in Syria could also gain access to such materials [chemical weapons].” For Clapper’s full statement, see James R. Clapper, “Worldwide Threat Assessment to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence,” Office of the Director of National Intelligence, March 12, 2013. Also see a report by senior British lawmakers in which they warned that “there has to be a significant risk that some of the country’s chemical weapons stockpile could fall into the hands of those with links to terrorism, in Syria or elsewhere in the region—if this happens, the consequences could be catastrophic.” For details, see “Risk of Chemical Catastrophe if Syria’s Assad Goes: UK Lawmakers,” Reuters, July 10, 2013.

5 “Syria Regional Refugee Response,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, August 19, 2013.

6 Anne Barnard and Eric Schmitt, “As Foreign Fighters Flood Syria, Fears of a New Extremist Haven,” *New York Times*, August 8, 2013.

7 Ibid.; “Risk of Chemical Catastrophe if Syria’s Assad Goes: UK Lawmakers.”

8 Barnard et al.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Bill Roggio, “Al Nasrah Front Launches Joint Assaults with Numerous Syrian Rebel Groups,” *The Long War Journal*, July 31, 2013; Josh Wood, “Jihadi Group Says it Stands with Other Syrian Rebels,” *New York Times*, January 9, 2013.

12 The 17-day battle for Qusayr between Syrian government and Hizb Allah forces against the opposition forced the rebels to abandon the town and marked a major victory for the al-Assad regime. For details, see Nicholas Blanford, “The Battle for Qusayr: How the Syrian Regime and Hizb Allah Tipped the Balance,” *CTC Sentinel* 6:8 (2013).

13 For a list of a few alleged foreign fighters, see Elias Groll, “PSA To Prospective Jihadists: The FBI Will Prosecute You if You Join Jabhat al-Nusra,” *Foreign Policy*, May 31, 2013. *New York Times* journalist Jeffrey Gettleman reported in July 2012 that “it seems the Antakya area [in Turkey] is becoming a magnet for foreign jihadis, who are flocking into Turkey to fight a holy war in Syria.” See Jeffrey Gettleman, “Fighters Replace Tourists Crossing Over From Syria to an Idyllic Turkish Town,” *New York Times*, July 28, 2012. For evidence of Swedish foreign fighters, see Per Gudmundson, “The Swedish Foreign Fighter Contingent in Syria,” *CTC Sentinel* 6:9 (2013); Misbah al-Ali and Antoine Amrieh, “Lebanese Suicide Bomber’s Family Celebrates Death of Kin in Syria,” *Daily Star*, August 5, 2013. Also see Barnard et al.

Acquisition

There are three potential ways that non-state actors could acquire CWs: military success, proliferation by the Syrian regime, or regime defectors.

The most transparent means for non-state actors to gain control over CWs is military success. The rebels have launched large, coordinated attacks against al-Assad's military facilities, and it is possible that they could overtake a CW storage site. Yet these attacks are frequently covered by

“A terrorist organization, without proper protective equipment, would be limited in the range it could transport a CW as the agent could potentially kill those moving it.”

international media who are embedded within the units, and they are certainly monitored by various international intelligence agencies. If rebels were to attack a facility known to store CWs, it would likely be discovered by concerned entities—such as the U.S. intelligence community—who might be able to enact contingency operations to prevent the spread of CWs. Nevertheless, recent reporting by the *Wall Street Journal* and other media outlets indicates that the al-Assad regime has not been storing the CWs in centralized locations, but instead “moving the stocks around for months to help avoid detection.”¹⁴ Dispersion of the CW stockpiles would make it difficult for the international community to know precisely where the weapons are located. The CW stockpiles, however, are also al-Assad's bargaining chip in staving off foreign intervention, so it is unlikely that he would compromise the security of such weapons.¹⁵

14 Adam Entous, Julian Barnes, and Nour Malas, “Elite Syrian Unit Scatters Chemical Arms Stockpile,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 12, 2013.

15 Jay Solomon, “Disarmament Talks Begin on Shaky Ground,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 13, 2013.

The second possible way for non-state actors to gain access to CWs is if the Syrian regime provides the weapons to a group such as Hizb Allah. This concept of “indebtedness” suggests that the al-Assad regime could hypothetically give Hizb Allah CWs to maintain their current or future support, or in an effort to hide CWs from international inspectors.¹⁶ In September 2013, U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel warned that “if Assad is prepared to use chemical weapons against his own people, we have to be concerned that terrorist groups like Hezbollah, which has forces in Syria supporting the Assad regime, could acquire and would use them.”¹⁷

The third possibility, which is perhaps the least likely, is for defectors within the Syrian military and government to alter the balance of the war by providing weapons such as CWs to rebel groups.¹⁸ Yet significant acquisition challenges would remain. The Syrian regime has likely established accountability redundancies, and more than one person would be required to oversee the movement of a CW. General security

16 Yaara Shalom, “Report: Syria is Transferring Chemical Weapons to Hezbollah to Avoid International Inspection,” *Jerusalem Post*, September 16, 2013.

17 Hagel. On September 16, 2013, a Lebanese member of parliament even went so far as to claim—albeit without presenting any evidence—that the al-Assad regime had already given Hizb Allah CWs to be stored in Hizb Allah-controlled mountain areas of Lebanon, where it would be difficult to find or monitor them. His claim is likely unsubstantiated rhetoric, but it shows the heightened concerns about Syria's CWs. For details, see *ibid*.

18 A number of Syrian officials have already defected to the rebels, the most prominent of whom is former Syrian Air Force Colonel Riad al-Asaad, who formed the FSA. A report in the *Daily Beast* told the story of Obeidah al-Mustafa, a former Syrian Army lieutenant who defected in 2012 and now leads the Liwa al-Fathin rebel brigade in Damascus. Al-Mustafa said that he is trying to facilitate more defections. See Mike Giglio, “Fearful of a U.S. Strike, Defectors Flee the Syrian Army,” *Daily Beast*, September 5, 2013. Moreover, according to a Reuters report, which cited former Syrian soldiers, “military sites in Syria are packed with soldiers who have been effectively imprisoned by their superiors due to doubts about their loyalty...Most of the commanding officers are from Assad's Alawite sect, an off-shoot of Shi'ite Islam, and fear their subordinates will defect, flee their posts or coordinate with rebel units...” See Oliver Holmes and Khaled Yacoub Oweis, “Exclusive: Syria Army Defectors Say U.S. Strikes Could Kill Assad Opponents,” Reuters, August 30, 2013.

procedures, for example, would prevent a soldier at a military storage site from moving a handful of CW rounds to his vehicle and driving off.

Employment

Chemical weapons can be disseminated in multiple forms including gases, liquids, and solids.¹⁹ These poisons are designed to be lethal and highly toxic. To affect large populations in open areas, however, CW agents must be delivered in large doses. Weather conditions—such as wind direction, temperature, and population density—affect the delivery of chemical agents. A vehicle-borne improvised explosive device laden with a chemical agent consequently would have limited success, whereas delivery of an agent in a confined space, such as in an arena or office building, could affect thousands.²⁰

The delivery concepts of CWs are relatively basic. The Aum Shinrikyo Sarin attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995 highlighted the intensity and amount of casualties expected by a CW attack employed by a small terrorist group in an enclosed space, as opposed to the massive amounts used against soldiers on World War One French battlefields. The Tokyo subway attack, which killed 13 and injured more than 5,000,²¹ also showed how dissemination does not require complex delivery systems, as would be required for biological weapons.²² CWs are designed to have a high boiling point so that an exploding shell does not destroy the chemical agent, although there are complex processes required when using a binary CW agent. Some binary agents need to be mixed in advance of being loaded into a delivery system,

19 Chemical weapons in a solid state will, depending on environmental conditions such as temperature and humidity, “off-gas” as their state changes from either solid to liquid or directly solid to gas.

20 In the case of a car bomb, the deadly gas from a CW would be disseminated by both the explosion and the wind, but it would need to be of high quantities to be effective.

21 Melissa Locker, “Tokyo Sarin Gas Attack Suspect Arrested, 17 Years Later,” *Time*, June 4, 2012.

22 Biological weapons (BW) are living organisms. Therefore, they require more complex delivery systems that are capable of dispersing the agent over a widespread area without destroying the agent. BW are not capable of withstanding the heat and pressure caused by an exploding ordinance like CWs.

such as a shell, while others are self-mixing where the detonation of the shell automatically mixes the precursors stored within it.

To maintain potency, CWs require unique handling and storage. CW agents are corrosive and degrade their own storage containers over time. A shell containing Sarin removed from its controlled storage environment would immediately begin degrading the seals of the container in the shell.²³ The vapor pressure in the container would also drastically increase as well as the acidity of the CW with increasing temperature. Since it is unlikely that a terrorist organization would have access to aircraft, it would be limited to using trucks or cars along hot, dusty roads to leave Syria.²⁴ A terrorist organization, without proper protective equipment, would be restricted in the range it could transport a CW as the agent could potentially kill those moving it. A terrorist group would be constrained to targeting regional actors unless provided sophisticated storage and transport capabilities.

Hizb Allah and Al-Qa`ida

Two groups that might be interested in acquiring CWs include Hizb Allah and al-Qa`ida.

Although Hizb Allah is a non-state actor, the group plays a major role in Lebanese politics and operates openly in southern Lebanon.²⁵ Consequently, Hizb Allah might determine that such weapons are best used as deterrence against a repeat of Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 2006, rather than in an offensive capacity which might invite a strong international response.

²³ Most containers are not 100% steel. There needs to be a rubber plug or epoxy to create a complete seal. These seals are quickly degraded once a gas such as Sarin is removed from its storage unit. There are other factors at play as well, not mentioned in this article.

²⁴ Blue Grass Army Depot in Kentucky has spent years cleaning up and repairing CW munitions that had spent their lifetime in controlled, secure environments so that they can simply transport the weapons to a neutralizing facility for destruction. See "Chemical Weapon Meltdown," *PEERreview*, 2007; "Meeting Summary," Kentucky Chemical Destruction Community Advisory Board, October 4, 2004.

²⁵ For a profile of Hizb Allah and its role in Lebanese politics, see Jonathan Masters, "Hezbollah," Council on Foreign Relations, July 22, 2013.

Nevertheless, Israel's security doctrine suggests it would take immediate military action to prevent Hizb Allah from acquiring CWs.²⁶

Al-Qa`ida, on the other hand, operates clandestinely and is not based in any one state. It has shown a prior interest in CWs, and U.S. security officials operate under the assumption that al-Qa`ida would use CWs if it acquired them.²⁷ There is evidence that al-Qa`ida experimented with crude chemical weapons in the past,²⁸ and the group even had a chemical and biological weapons expert, Abu Khabab al-Masri, who was killed by a U.S. drone in 2009.²⁹ Moreover, al-Qa`ida in Iraq used the chemical chlorine in more than a dozen bombs in 2007.³⁰ Director of National Intelligence James Clapper told Congress in January 2012 that the U.S. intelligence community worries "about a limited CBR [chemical, biological and radiological] attack in the United States or against our interests overseas in the next year because of the interest expressed in such a capability by some foreign groups, such as al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)."³¹

²⁶ Yuval Steinitz, Israel's international relations, intelligence and strategic affairs minister, said that Israel "has drawn a red line over the transfer of chemical weapons to terrorist organizations, including Hezbollah." See Yaakov Lappin, "Steinitz: Israel Can See if Assad is Moving Syria's Chemical Weapons," *Jerusalem Post*, September 15, 2013. For more details on Israel's security doctrine, see Arie Perliger, "Israel's Response to the Crisis in Syria," *CTC Sentinel* 6:8 (2013).

²⁷ An argument can be made that there is not enough evidence to prove that al-Qa`ida would employ CWs if it acquired that capability. According to this reasoning, al-Qa`ida (or an affiliated group) would refrain from using CWs due to concerns that such use would cause a loss of support. Regardless, the U.S. intelligence community and law enforcement clearly consider this outcome a possibility and prepare accordingly.

²⁸ Barton Gellman, "Al Qaeda Nears Biological, Chemical Arms Production," *Washington Post*, March 23, 2003. ²⁹ Farhan Bokhari, "Officials: Al Qaeda's Mad Scientist Killed," CBS News, September 10, 2009.

³⁰ There should be a distinction, however, between chlorine bombs and CWs such as the one used by Aum Shinrikyo on the Tokyo subway in 1995. Chlorine is a toxic industrial chemical and not a true CW. For details, see "Chlorine Bomb Hits Iraq Village," BBC, May 16, 2007; Peter Bergen, "Reevaluating Al-Qa`ida's Weapons of Mass Destruction Capabilities," *CTC Sentinel* 3:9 (2010).

³¹ James R. Clapper, "Unclassified Statement for the Record on the Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US

Yet due to the restrictions in transporting CWs, al-Qa`ida would most likely be limited to a target in the immediate Middle East region. Regardless of the target, a successful CW attack could further destabilize a region already struggling to define itself in the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings. A CW attack on Western interests—such as an embassy—within any country in the region might increase the legitimacy of a terrorist group among its supporters, and force Western governments to reevaluate the threat picture.

Conclusion

In a positive development, the Syrian government provided "an initial declaration" of its chemical weapons program on September 20, the first step in a U.S.-Russian deal for Syria to relinquish its CW stockpiles.³²

Yet until it becomes clear that the Syrian regime is committed to the agreement—especially in light of recent reports that it is continuously moving around its CW stockpiles—the risk for proliferation remains.³³

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Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence," Office of the Director of National Intelligence, January 31, 2012. Also see a recent report that three men charged with being members of al-Shabab, an al-Qa`ida affiliate, "had substantial knowledge regarding an al-Shabaab research and development department that was developing chemical weapons." See "Court Document References Al Qaeda-linked Chemical Weapons Program in Somalia," CBS, September 19, 2013.

³² Michael R. Gordon and Nick Cumming-Bruce, "Syria Meets its First Test of Accord on Weapons," *New York Times*, September 20, 2013.

³³ On September 23, 2013, al-Assad said that inspectors might have a difficult time accessing CW sites because "militants might want to stop the experts' arrival." See "Assad: Syria Will Allow Access to Chemical Sites," Associated Press, September 23, 2013; Entous et al.

The Swedish Foreign Fighter Contingent in Syria

By Per Gudmundson

IN APRIL 2013, the Swedish Security Service estimated that “around 30” individuals from Sweden have traveled to Syria to join “groups inspired by al-Qa`ida.”¹ This author has identified 18 fighters from Sweden who have joined the war in Syria—including their real names and social security numbers—and has researched their backgrounds and relationships.² Using public records, this article explores the socioeconomic backgrounds, regional distribution, criminal records and ethnicities of the 18 fighters. It also includes more anecdotal data from information collected through social media to show group affiliations, casualties and previous connections to terrorism and the global jihadist movement.

The article finds that although the typical fighter from Sweden in the Syrian war is a young man with an immigrant background, most of the fighters are not of Syrian descent. The majority of the fighters come from relative poverty, while many have criminal records. Half of the fighters have previous links to terrorism or activities in the global jihadist movement.

Origins

Public records show that men who traveled from Sweden to fight in Syria are more or less “homegrown” in the sense that they attended the Swedish school system and, if not born in Sweden, have

1 “The Swedish Security Service Yearbook,” Swedish Security Service, April 15, 2013. The number of fighters from Sweden is much higher than in previous conflicts. As a comparison, the previous most attractive conflict zone for jihadists in Sweden was Somalia. Yet between 2006 and 2012, “around 30” jihadists from Sweden traveled to Somalia to fight. See “Säpo bevakar terrortränade svenskar,” *Dagens Nyheter*, February 27, 2012.

2 The author used ordinary journalism methods to identify the fighters, mainly through their own presence and connections on social media. In a few cases, where there have been uncertainties, the author used sources from within Swedish security agencies on condition of anonymity. Although all of the 18 have been identified, this article purposely only provides their pseudonyms. Being a member of a terrorist organization, or being a fighter in a civil war, is not a crime in Sweden.

lived there since childhood.³ Almost all of the 18 identified fighters lived in southwestern Sweden, and more than half in the suburbs of Gothenburg, Sweden’s second largest city. Of the 18 fighters, 11 came from two neighboring suburbs of Gothenburg, Angered and Bergsjön. This gives credence to claims from Swedish terrorism expert Magnus Norell who recently said that recruitment in Sweden seems to occur through friendship ties.⁴ Three of the identified fighters, for example, were active members of the same Gothenburg club for Mixed Martial Arts.⁵ Others were frequent visitors to a well-known Gothenburg radical mosque, the Bellevue Masjid.⁶ Some are even relatives of one another.

The fighters all have immigrant backgrounds, but only one has a direct connection to Syria. The fighter Abo Isa, a Palestinian, was born in the Syrian city of Homs in 1984.⁷ He migrated to Sweden at the age of eight, and became a citizen in July 1992. He traveled to Syria in the middle of June 2013, probably through Turkey,⁸ which is believed to be the most common route to enter Syria among fighters from Sweden.⁹

3 In Sweden, the Tax Agency (Skatteverket) keeps the population register, which is easily accessible to the public. All information on fighters’ residences, children, parents, siblings, citizenship, home countries, etc., was collected from Skatteverket.

4 “Terrorrexperten: Rekruterarna jagar nya krigare i Göteborg,” *Göteborgs-Posten*, July 31, 2013.

5 Abu Kamal, Abu Dharar Filibino and Abu Abdurrahman were all active in the club GBG MMA in Gothenburg.

6 Khaled SigSauer, Abu Omar and Mark Abu Usama were all visitors to the Bellevue mosque.

7 The Swedish population register does not track ethnicity, but Abo Isa describes himself as a Palestinian on his Instagram profile.

8 Abo Isa displays a Turkish phone number on his Facebook profile. In the comments section to a picture of himself with an AK-47 on his Instagram account, there is a dialogue, dated to the middle of June, with a girlfriend where he instructed her to use the Turkish phone number from that point forward.

9 Professor Magnus Ranstorp, research director of the Centre for Asymmetric Threat Studies at the Swedish National Defence College, stated that the most common route to Syria is by plane to Ankara or Istanbul, and by bus from there to villages near the Syrian border. See “Om svenska jihadisterna i Syrien,” *Sveriges Radio Studio Ett*, June 13, 2013.

A third of the fighters were born in Sweden to immigrant parents. The rest migrated to Sweden, typically during childhood, with their families. The fighters and their families hail from many countries: Iraq, Jordan, Kosovo, Morocco, and even the Philippines.¹⁰ Yet as many as 10 are of Lebanese

“All but two of the 18 fighters carry Swedish passports. The two without Swedish passports are Lebanese citizens who lived in Sweden for many years.”

descent (two of those are said to be Palestinians). Only one, Abu Kamal, has any Scandinavian family history. Abu Kamal, a Swedish citizen who was reported “martyred” in January 2013, was born in Esbo, Finland.¹¹ His parents were a Finnish convert mother and a Sudanese father, both living in Sweden. All but two of the 18 fighters carry Swedish passports. The two without Swedish passports are Lebanese citizens who lived in Sweden for many years.¹²

The 18 fighters are all male, with the median age 23.5. The youngest fighter was born in 1994, while five are over 30, with the oldest born in 1976.¹³

All of the 18 fighters are generally from large families, where the median number of children is five. Three fighters have children of their own. Two of them left their wives and children in Sweden.¹⁴

10 The full data for country of origin: Lebanon: 10 fighters (2 Palestinians); Iraq: 2 fighters (1 Palestinian); Jordan: 1 fighter; Kosovo: 1 fighter; Morocco: 1 fighter; Philippines: 1 fighter; Syria: 1 fighter; Sudan/Finland: 1 fighter.

11 His family wrote about his martyrdom and his upbringing on January 26, 2013, in Sudan’s *al-Rakoba* magazine, available at www.alrakoba.net/articles-action-show-id-29641.htm.

12 Rabih, who has lived in Sweden for 16 years, and Abu Omar Kurdi, who has lived in Sweden for 23 years, are Lebanese citizens.

13 The full data for birth years: 1976: 1 fighter; 1978: 3 fighters; 1983: 1 fighter; 1984: 1 fighter; 1987: 1 fighter; 1989: 3 fighters; 1990: 4 fighters; 1991: 2 fighters; 1993: 1 fighter; 1994: 1 fighter.

14 Technically, only one fighter is married in the eyes of

Isa al-Suedi, however, has two small children with his Swedish convert wife, and the whole family reportedly moved to Aleppo, Syria.¹⁵

Public records also show that the fighters typically come from low income families¹⁶ in high-rise suburbs and are low earners themselves.¹⁷ Only four of the fighters have had incomes high enough to indicate that they had steady employment when they departed for Syria, according to the latest available records from the Swedish tax agency. Six others have incomes so low that they likely only worked part-time. Eight of them reported no income at all, indicating that they have lived at home with their parents, or on social welfare.¹⁸

At least eight of the fighters have criminal records. That figure could be higher because older criminal records are not easily searched in Sweden.¹⁹ Most of the charges are for petty crimes.²⁰ Four of the fighters committed narcotics crimes, typically use or possession of small amounts of

the Swedish government: Abu Omar Kurdi. Islamic traditions say otherwise. Mark Abu Osama, for example, is said to have two wives, but in the Swedish register he is listed as divorced. See Echorouk TV, December 2012, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEuCPfvWmF4.

15 Isa al-Suedi stated on his Facebook profile that he lives in Aleppo. His wife's decision to move to Syria was deeply contested by friends and family on her Facebook wall. 16 Sixteen fighters come from families whose incomes are in decile eight, nine or ten, which means their family incomes are between \$3,000-\$25,000 per year.

17 In Sweden, details in tax returns are easily accessible by the public through the Tax Agency. Information on fighters' incomes was collected there.

18 The pay is not good in Syria, either. In a news report, an unidentified jihadist from Sweden, Abu Bakr, was said to earn \$150 a month fighting for Kataib al-Muhajirin. See "How British Women are Joining the Jihad in Syria," Channel 4, July 23, 2013.

19 Criminal records are not centrally stored in Sweden, and it is often difficult to search for cases that are older than five years. The author used the web-based research tool at Piscatus.se that digitally collects all verdicts from all courts.

20 The information on petty crime corresponds with a news report, broadcast in the middle of June 2013, where the reporters researched "about 10" Swedish jihadists in Syria and found that some of them had committed petty crimes, which is typical with all youth from the suburbs. See "Svenska Bilal strider för al-Qaida i Syrien," Sveriges Radio, June 17, 2013.

cannabis (marijuana).²¹ Three of the fighters committed violent crimes, two of those being of the less serious variety. Abu Taha, for example, assaulted his younger brothers at home in a family dispute gone overboard.²²

One of the fighters in Syria, however, can be considered a hardened criminal. Abo Isa, 29-years-old, has been charged with 15 criminal offenses and has been sentenced to prison three times. His records include repeated assaults and threats directed at a girlfriend, a series of narcotics crimes, and illegally carrying a knife in public. His most recent conviction for a violent crime was in early November 2012.²³

Activities in Syria

Public records do not tell the whole story of the 18 fighters. Based on social media and press reports, eight of them have already died in Syria.²⁴

Abu Kamal, born in March 1990, was allegedly killed by shrapnel when a shell fired from a tank hit the wall next to him in the suburbs of Aleppo.²⁵ His death was announced in January 2013, the same month he is said to have died.²⁶ A martyr video titled *Shaheed Abu Kamal*, released in mid-March, stated that he

21 Surprisingly, Umm Aya Bint Eswede, the Swedish convert wife accompanying her fighter husband, has been convicted of smuggling lesser amounts of psychedelic mushrooms and cannabis for personal use.

22 These details can be found in Göteborgs tingsrätt (Gothenburg Regional Court) case #B 3518-05.

23 These details can be found in Hovrätten för Västra Sverige (Court of Appeal for Western Sweden) case #B 4418-12.

24 The chaotic situation makes it hard for Sweden to get official information from Syria. This is not a new phenomenon. Previous "martyrs" from Sweden, such as al-Qa'ida in Iraq's second-in-command, Mohamed Moumou (also known as Abu Qaswarah), are still not registered as dead in Swedish records. They remain listed as "emigrated." Also, these details should not be interpreted as the casualty rate for all Swedish fighters (that approximately eight out of every 18 will die). Instead, the high number of dead is because jihadists like to publish "martyrdom" announcements for dead fighters.

25 A Swedish daily reported that Abu Kamal's death was announced by Jabhat al-Nusra. The author has not been able to verify that claim independently. See "Terrogrupp: Svensk jihadist dödad i Syrien," *Expressen*, February 27, 2013.

26 Ibid.

fought for Kataib al-Muhajirin.²⁷ The same group took credit for the operation in which he was killed (a British foreign fighter died with him).²⁸ The video said that Abu Kamal was buried in Aleppo.²⁹

Abu Omar, born in October 1991, died in early April 2013 from a head injury caused by a rocket-propelled grenade. He fought for an "extremely religious group," according to Albanian news outlet Telegrafi.³⁰

Abu Dharr, born in October 1991, spoke in the first jihadist propaganda video made entirely in Swedish, *Och uppmana de troende att strida*, released through YouTube in late November 2012 by the "Swedish Muhajereen Fi Ash Sham" group.³¹ He was reported dead five months later, in the middle of April, with no details on the circumstances.³²

Abu Abdurrahman, born in July 1989, reportedly died in Idlib in northwestern Syria in early June 2013.³³ His death announcement did not contain details.³⁴ A British news report broadcast only days after the announcement of his death and based on exclusive access to foreign fighters in northern Syria portrayed him as a fighter for Kataib al-Muhajirin.³⁵

27 Kataib al-Muhajirin merged with other groups to become Jaysh al-Muhajirin wa-al-Ansar in March 2013. It is led by a Chechen, and the group has a large foreign fighter contingent.

28 The English version of *Shaheed Abu Kamal* is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=4sRq3sy1UpU.

29 Abu Kamal was reported dead on January 26, 2013. Friends announced his death in the Swedish Muslim mailing list "Fatimazahra - Systrar i Islam." His family wrote about his death in the Sudanese magazine *al-Rakoba* also on January 26.

30 "Dhjetë shqiptarë 'bien për lirinë e popullit sirian,'" Telegrafi, April 13, 2013.

31 YouTube deleted the original, but the video can still be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzDXQOF-jKO.

32 "Abu Dharr" was reported dead via the Jordanian news site assaqaifa.com, among others. Also, a now-defunct jihadist Facebook page (www.facebook.com/Strangers.Sy) published a notice.

33 Abu Abdurrahman's death was announced on June 12, 2013, on the Facebook page at www.facebook.com/shahed.3ayan. This page covers the war in Syria.

34 Ibid.

35 "Britons Fighting with Syria's Jihadi 'Band of Brothers,'" Channel 4, June 14, 2013.

Brothers Abu Maaz, born in May 1994, and Abu Osman, born in February 1993, were raised in the Swedish town Borås in a large family of Lebanese heritage. The older brother, Abu Osman, entered Syria from Lebanon in early January 2013. He was followed by his brother two months later. They were killed in

“Just being a member of a terrorist organization, however, is not a crime in Sweden.”

an attack on an army checkpoint in Abu Zeid near the famous crusader castle Krac des Chevaliers in the region of Homs.³⁶ The younger brother performed a suicide mission with a car bomb.³⁷ The older brother died from small arms fire in the pursuant assault.³⁸ Their deaths were announced by Jund al-Sham and representatives from the family.³⁹ At the same time, the family revealed that another brother also had died fighting 18 months earlier.⁴⁰ Rabih, the third brother, was born in 1978 to the same father and a different mother, also of Lebanese descent, in Kuwait. He migrated to Sweden at the age of nine, but retained his Lebanese citizenship while also being registered as a resident in Borås. He was killed in sectarian clashes in Tripoli, Lebanon, in 2012, according to the family.⁴¹

Abu Omar Kurdi, born in 1976, reportedly died on the last day of Ramadan in August 2013 during the final attack on the Menagh air base outside of Aleppo.⁴² His death was announced on Facebook by a jihadist friend from Sweden a few days later.⁴³

36 “Lebanese-Swedish Brothers Killed in Syria,” Agence France-Presse, August 3, 2013. This was also revealed on a Facebook page.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Since the incidents in Tripoli in February 2012 are generally considered spillovers from the war in Syria, Rabih is included here among the fighters actually in Syria.

42 The unidentified fighter, Abu Yaqeen, published the announcement in the radical Swedish Facebook group “Ummah Nyheter” on August 9, 2013.

43 Ibid.

There have also been reports of wounded fighters from Sweden. One told a reporter about a friend “seriously wounded in his leg.”⁴⁴ A Facebook account, operated by unidentified fighters from Sweden in northern Syria, said that those wounded in Syria are taken up to areas next to the Turkish border for medical treatment. “Unfortunately, we are circa 3 brothers that are wounded, so we have to stay close to the border, and then some may need good care and then you have to go to Turkey,” the Facebook account stated. The fighter also explained the upside to being wounded: better internet access. “This account may not be active that long, if not anyone else gets wounded and takes it over,” it said. The account has been up and running since the start of May 2013, with frequent updates in Swedish.⁴⁵

Apart from the eight deaths noted above, two other men from Sweden have been reported dead, although the author has not been able to corroborate their pseudonyms with their real identities. Adam Samir Wali hailed from Libya, according to his martyr announcement, but lived in Sweden and left to fight in Syria. Internet sources claimed that he died from grenade shrapnel on March 29, 2013.⁴⁶ One source claimed that he was a fighter for the Free Syrian Army (FSA), which would mean he is the only fighter from Sweden to claim affiliation with the more “secular” FSA.⁴⁷ In late August 2013, fighters from Sweden announced that Abu Mohammad al-Baghdadi, from Sweden, had been killed, but provided no details.⁴⁸

44 *Expressen* interview with “Abou Tauba,” an unidentified fighter from Gothenburg, published on February 24, 2013.

45 This account is available at www.facebook.com/ghurabasyrien.syrien.1.

46 A now defunct webpage for Libyan martyrs, www.facebook.com/ShuhadaLibyafeSuria, published the first death notice. Another can be found on the Ansar al-Mujahideen web forum.

47 The broader rebel opposition in Syria has much support in Sweden (from exiled Syrians, for example), but there have been almost no indications of any individuals from Sweden fighting for the FSA. Neither have there been any reports of Shi’a Muslims from Sweden fighting with Lebanese Hizb Allah or nationalist Kurds fighting with the YPG, and there are no reports about conscripts in the regular Syrian army.

48 This announcement was posted at www.facebook.com/SollentunasMuslimer.

All of the 18 fighters are Sunni, and every fighter, both identified and unidentified, where anything at all is known, joined the more radical Islamic rebel groups (except Adam Samir Wali who joined the FSA). They have fought for Jabhat al-Nusra, Kataib al-Muhajirin and Jund al-Sham. In fact, the video *Shabeed Abu Kamal* stated that Abu Kamal first joined the FSA, but grew disappointed because “most of them [the FSA] didn’t pray, [but] listened to music, and smoked cigarettes.”⁴⁹ He then left Syria for Turkey, where he met his old friend Abu Suleiman from Sweden, who convinced him to go back and instead join Kataib al-Muhajirin, according to the video.⁵⁰

During recent months, after the claimed (and then rejected) merger of Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq, several fighters from Sweden clearly identify themselves with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), judging by the content on their Facebook pages.⁵¹

A major concern of Swedish security officials is whether Swedish citizens have committed any terrorist acts, war crimes or other atrocities in the Syrian conflict. There are some worrying signs. One obvious incident is the suicide bombing conducted by 19-year-old Abu Maaz, one of the Lebanese brothers. Yet there are no credible reports about the casualties (Jund al-Sham boasted that 200 soldiers were killed).⁵² The fact that fighters from Sweden have fought with, or side-by-side, Jabhat al-Nusra and the ISIL is another concern. Just being a member of a terrorist organization, however, is not a crime in Sweden.⁵³

49 The English version of *Shabeed Abu Kamal* is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=4sRq3sy1UpU.

50 Ibid.

51 For example, the Facebook accounts Ghuraba Syrien and Sollentunas Muslimer, both operated by groups of Swedish jihadists in Syria, identify themselves with the ISIL.

52 The original claim was located on the following Facebook page, which has since been taken down: www.facebook.com/JUNDALSHAMI.

53 Terrorism trials in Sweden have shown that a suspect has to be connected to a specific terrorist attack to be regarded as a terrorist, roughly speaking. Sending money to a terrorist group like Hamas is not a crime. Completing training and working as a foot soldier with al-Shabab is not a crime. Taking part in a bombing against civilians, however, is a crime.

Evidence of possible war crimes is not easy to confirm. Abu Dharar Filibbini, however, has been the most prolific publisher of photographs from the war. In mid-December 2012, he posted a series of photographs from when Kataib al-Muhajirin and Jabhat al-

“Another concern is whether fighters will return to Sweden with the intention to perform jihadist activities at home or in Europe.”

Nusra captured the Sheikh Suleiman air base. In one of the pictures, he posed triumphantly with his foot placed on the head of a slain enemy in civilian clothes. Other pictures from the same battle showed inhumane treatment of prisoners and him posing with corpses.

He is not the only one to publish photographs of atrocities. The most gruesome photo yet was published in early July 2013 by an unidentified fighter from Sweden, Abu Ikrema. It showed a fighter—most likely himself—posing with the head from a decapitated man.⁵⁴

Previous Jihadist Connections

As many as nine of the 18 have previous links to terrorism or the global jihadist movement. The 34-year-old Isa al-Suedi from Halmstad is the older brother to a convicted terrorist currently serving a 12-year prison sentence in Denmark after plotting a Mumbai-style attack on the *Jyllands-Posten* newspaper office in Copenhagen along with three other individuals living in Sweden. The terrorist brother is no stranger to conflict zones himself. He was arrested both on the Somali border in 2007 and in Pakistan's Waziristan tribal agency in 2009.⁵⁵

54 The photo was later removed from Facebook.

55 Actually, three of the four convicted for the Copenhagen plot had experience from travel in jihadist conflict zones. The Copenhagen plot was suspected to be masterminded by Ilyas Kashmiri. See Paul Cruickshank, “The Militant Pipeline Between the Afghanistan-Pakistan Border Region and the West,” New America Foundation, July 2012.

One of the dead fighters, Abu Omar, is the son of an Albanian jihadist from Mitrovica in Kosovo who was sentenced to seven years and four months in prison by a Serbian court in 2000 for preparing alleged terrorist crimes with a group called Abu Bakr Siddiq.⁵⁶

The three dead Swedish-Lebanese brothers also have an interesting family history. An uncle to the brothers, Youssef el-Hajj Dib, is currently in prison in Germany for trying to kill German civilians with bombs hidden in suitcases—commonly referred to as the German train bombing plot of May 2006.⁵⁷ Another uncle, Saddam el-Hajj Dib, was regarded as the fourth highest leader in Lebanese Fatah al-Islam when he was killed fighting against the Lebanese army in May 2007.⁵⁸

One fighter, Khaled SigSauer, born in July 1990 and a cousin to the deceased Abu Abdurrahman, figured in the background of a jihadist-related case of attempted murder in Sweden in the fall of 2011. Four young men in Gothenburg were arrested on the suspicion that they planned to murder the Swedish artist Lars Vilks.⁵⁹ The four men, who were subsequently freed by the court,⁶⁰ carried knives on their way to an art fair where the alleged stabbing was to occur. One of the knives had been provided by Khaled SigSauer, who was friends with two of the suspects. Khaled SigSauer was interrogated during the investigation, court documents show.⁶¹

56 KMDLNIJ / CDHRF Prishtina, report #506, July 2000. For an interview with the father, see www.ex-yupress.com/danas/danas30.html.

57 “The Brothers Deeb: A Family’s Terrorism Saga,” *al-Akbar*, August 7, 2013.

58 Another close relative, currently living in Sweden, has posted pictures of himself online with the controversial British preacher Anjem Choudary.

59 In 2007, ISI chief Abu `Umar al-Baghdadi promised \$100,000 for the murder of Lars Vilks, and \$50,000 more if Vilks was slaughtered like a lamb. See “Al-Qaeda Offers Reward for Cartoonist’s Death,” ABC News, September 15, 2007.

60 The court found the four innocent of the accused murder attempt, but stated that they had planned something “in the like of what the prosecutor has described,” meaning assaulting Vilks. The four were instead convicted of illegally carrying knives.

61 These details can be found in Göteborgs tingsrätt (Gothenburg district court) case #B-12823-11.

Abu Omar Kurdi ran a website, www.tawhid-islam.se, which for years was the only site in Swedish that openly propagated violent jihad.⁶² According to a news report, the Swedish Security Service had information that Abu Omar Kurdi was a jihadist already in 2003.⁶³

Abu Salman is another propagandist who started a website in 2011 based on material from `Abdullah `Azzam, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and Ibn Taymiyya, among others.⁶⁴ He also provided one of Norway’s most infamous Islamists (later a fighter in Syria) with living quarters in Stockholm.⁶⁵

Thirty-five-year-old Abu Dharar Filibbino is the only fighter who boasted of previous jihadist fighting experience. When he first announced that he was in Syria—via Facebook using his real name—in late October 2012, he claimed that he had been trained by Lashkar-i-Tayyiba in Pakistan during the spring of 2001.⁶⁶

Another concern is whether fighters will return to Sweden with the intention to perform jihadist activities at home or in Europe. According to sources within Swedish intelligence agencies, however, fighters have already returned home. One fighter, Abu Dharar Filibbino, returned in the spring of 2013, now a battle-hardened veteran. At home in Gothenburg, he resurrected his Facebook profile and started to post pictures from his battles, advice on the equipment needed in war, movies from training, and also a film showing him and other fighters from Sweden experimenting with explosives.⁶⁷ He also

62 A recent report to the Swedish government on internet extremism dedicated no less than seven pages to an analysis of www.islam-tawhid.se. See “Väldsbejakande och antidemokratiska budskap på internet,” Swedish Media Council, May 2013.

63 “Svensk var hemlig agent åt tre länder samtidigt,” *Dagens Nyheter*, June 11, 2012.

64 The website, www.islamquransunnah.com, was closed down by its owner after it was exposed.

65 Per Gudmundson, “Ökänd norsk islamist sägs ha flyttat till Stockholm,” gudmundson.blogspot.se, October 30, 2011.

66 His Facebook account later specifically mentioned Muzaffarabad in Kashmir as the location of the training grounds.

67 The author has chosen not to identify this Facebook page, as these activities are not necessarily a crime in Sweden.

published a series of new homemade logos, indicating that he was toying with the idea of starting an organization of some kind, possibly in Sweden.

Conclusion

Based on the data that currently exists, the typical fighter from Sweden in the Syrian war is a young man living in the southwest of Sweden, probably in the suburbs of Gothenburg. He has an immigrant background, but is not of Syrian descent. As with other young immigrants, he is relatively poor, without a steady job, and has been charged with petty crimes in the past. What might make him unique is that he has friends or relatives who also became fighters, or he was already connected, in some way, to the global jihadist movement.

Still, the size of the Swedish contingent in Syria seems to have surprised the Swedish Security Service. The only official estimate on the total number of jihadists in Sweden was published by the Swedish Security Service in December 2010.⁶⁸ On a given year, it said “around 200” individuals from Sweden could be considered active in the jihadist movement in one way or another. In light of the number of men from Sweden who have already joined the war in Syria, that overall number seems low. Half of the fighters identified in this article had no known previous connections to the jihadist movement and may not have been included in the 2010 count. Indeed, the Syrian war continues to attract young men from Sweden at a pace not seen in previous jihadist conflicts.⁶⁹ Unless stricter enforcement measures are taken, this participation rate may continue to rise.

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Pakistani Fighters Joining the War in Syria

By Zia Ur Rehman

MORE THAN TWO years since the beginning of the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad, Syria has become an attractive destination for Sunni foreign fighters.¹ Al-Qa`ida has exploited the Syrian civil war, and hundreds of fighters from various Muslim countries have traveled to Syria to fight with al-Qa`ida or one of its affiliated groups, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Jabhat al-Nusra.² For its part, various Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) commanders have claimed to have sent militants to Syria to join the fighting against the al-Assad regime.³

This article examines the presence of the TTP in Syria and the factors behind the group's possible participation in the Syrian civil war. It also looks at the TTP's propaganda toward the al-Assad regime, their global outreach and the impact of the Syrian war in Pakistan.

Reports of TTP Fighters in Syria

Recent media reports and interviews with TTP militants suggest that the Pakistani Taliban have sent militants to fight alongside rebels in Syria. Mohammad Amin, described by the BBC as the TTP's coordinator for Syrian affairs, said that the TTP have established a base in Syria with the help of Arab fighters who had previously fought in Afghanistan.⁴ The purpose of the base, Amin said, is to assess the “ongoing jihad” in Syria and coordinate joint operations with Syrian militants.⁵ Another TTP senior commander said that the decision to send Pakistani fighters to Syria came at the appeal of their “Arab friends.”⁶

Separately, a mid-level TTP commander said that the TTP are prepared to help Muslims worldwide and determined to provide manpower support to ease the hardships of Syria's Sunni Muslim community.⁷ He claimed that the Iranian regime is sending Pakistani Shi'a fighters to Syria through Iran and Iraq to join al-Assad's forces to suppress Syria's majority Sunni Muslim population.⁸ Although there are no confirmed reports that Pakistani Shi'a fighters have shown up on the battlefield in Syria, Shi'a scholars in Iran have issued *fatawa* (religious decrees) directing their followers to fight in Syria.⁹ Moreover, Shi'a militant leaders fighting in Syria and those in charge of recruitment in Iraq claim that the number of volunteers has increased dramatically since the *fatawa* were issued.¹⁰

The network sending Pakistani Sunni fighters to Syria is jointly run by the TTP and the banned sectarian group Lashkar-i-Jhangvi (LJ), both of which are affiliated with al-Qa`ida.¹¹ The network has reportedly sent between 100-150 fighters.¹² Abdul Rashid Abbasi, a close associate of TTP chief Hakimullah Mehsud, said that 120 fighters are already in Syria where they are under the command-and-control structure of al-Qa`ida in Syria.¹³ The leaders of this network are Usman Ghani, a former LJ commander, and Alimullah Umry, a TTP commander from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province.¹⁴

According to al-Jazira, Pakistani militants in Syria fight under the platform of Katibat Muhajiroon, a Latakia-based jihadist group solely

7 Personal interview, TTP commander who identified himself as Omar because he was not authorized to speak to the media, August 5, 2013.

8 Ibid.

9 Suadad al-Salhy, “Syria War Widens Rift Between Shi'ite Clergy in Iraq, Iran,” Reuters, July 20, 2013.

10 Ibid.

11 Zarar Khan and Sebastian Abbot, “Islamic Militants Leave Pakistan to Fight in Syria,” Associated Press, July 14, 2013; Shoaib-ur-Rehman Siddiqui, “Taliban Joining Syria Conflict?” *Business Recorder*, September 1, 2013.

12 Ibid.

13 Saima Mohsin and Joe Sterling, “Syrian Opposition Questions Taliban Rebel Role,” CNN, July 19, 2013; “Islamic Militants Stream Out of Pakistan in Growing Numbers to Fight in Syria,” Associated Press, July 14, 2013.

14 Ibid.

1 Personal interview, Ahmed Wali Mujeeb, a BBC journalist based in Islamabad, August 8, 2013.

2 Bruce Riedel, “Al Qaeda is Back,” *Daily Beast*, July 26, 2013.

3 Ahmed Wali Mujeeb, “Pakistan Taliban ‘Sets up a Base in Syria,’” BBC, July 12, 2013.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Maria Golovkina and Jibrán Ahmad, “Pakistan Taliban Set Up Camps in Syria, Join Anti-Assad War,” Reuters, July 14, 2013.

68 “Väldsbejakande islamistisk extremism i Sverige,” Swedish Security Service, December 16, 2010.

69 For comparisons to other conflicts, see footnote #1.

composed of foreign militants belonging to various Islamic and European countries and led by a Libyan, Abu Jaafar al Libi.¹⁵ The Pakistani groups that have sent fighters to Syria include the TTP, the LJ and the Hafiz Gul Bahadur group.¹⁶ The TTP also asked its commanders in Mohmand, Bajaur, Khyber, Orakzai and Waziristan tribal agencies to enlist new fighters to participate in the Syrian war.¹⁷

On July 31, 2013, an Urdu-language jihadist forum posted an authentic video confirming the presence of TTP fighters in Syria for the first time.¹⁸ The video, produced by the ISIL, showed a short clip of 10-20 TTP fighters on the ground in Syria.¹⁹ Additionally, a media report in September claimed that 30 bodies of Pakistani jihadists killed in Syria have been sent back to Pakistan, the majority of whom were associated with the LJ and the TTP's Punjab faction.²⁰

Despite these claims, however, other reports state that the TTP's leadership has rejected suggestions that they are sending militants to Syria. One TTP leader told reporters that some of their fighters have traveled to Syria independently, but that the TTP's focus remained in Pakistan. He said that while the TTP supports the Syrian rebels, the TTP have their own targets in the immediate region.²¹ The Pakistani government has also rejected claims that Pakistani militants have joined the war in Syria.²² The Syrian National Council called the news of Pakistani fighters traveling to Syria as part of a

"systematic" campaign by pro-al-Assad forces to smear the rebels.²³

The Pakistani Taliban's Global Outreach

It is not a surprise, however, that Pakistani militants have joined the war in Syria. Pakistanis have become involved in international jihadist violence in recent decades, and militants from Pakistan have fought in several regions, especially in Afghanistan, Central Asia and the Balkans.²⁴ The TTP work in a close alliance with al-Qa`ida, and their recent dispatch of fighters to Syria shows their desire to play a role in foreign jihadist theaters.²⁵ In a January 2013 video, TTP chief Hakimullah Mehsud, while discussing the organization's post 2014 objectives, described the TTP as an "international" organization.²⁶ When asked about the uprisings in Arab Spring countries, Hakimullah said, "We support them and we will aid them. If they need our blood, our life; if they need our people, we are ready for every type of assistance so that the democratic and secular system [in Arab nations] comes to an end."²⁷

There are other examples of Pakistani militants joining foreign conflicts. Niger's President Mahamadou Issoufou warned in June 2012 that jihadist fighters from Pakistan and Afghanistan were training militants in northern Mali.²⁸ Yemeni intelligence sources claimed that al-Qa`ida was bringing Pakistani explosives experts into Yemen, and that one of them, Ragaa Bin Ali, was killed in a drone strike in Yemen in 2013.²⁹ The TTP also sent Faisal Shahzad, a young Pakistani who had been living in the United States, on a mission to bomb New York's Times Square in May 2010, a plot that ultimately failed.³⁰

The TTP have also threatened to attack Myanmar to avenge crimes against the Muslim Rohingya population, and pledged to send fighters to Kashmir to wage a struggle for the implementation of Shari`a in India.³¹ Several Pakistani fighters fought in the Bosnian civil war in 1992-1995, and in the Nagorno-Karabakh war in 1988-1994 on the side of Azerbaijan.³² Some fighters also participated in the recent war in Iraq.³³

Implications

As Pakistani militants increasingly view the war in Syria through a sectarian lens, security analysts believe that the conflict could exacerbate Sunni-Shi`a tensions in Pakistan.³⁴ Since 1989, sectarian fighting has claimed thousands of lives in Pakistan, mostly from the Shi`a community.³⁵ Pakistan has experienced a sharp resurgence in sectarian violence in the last decade, which can be traced to the rise of the Pakistani Taliban in the mid-2000s and the organization's growing ties to banned militant sectarian outfits in Pakistan, such as the LJ.³⁶ The TTP, the LJ and affiliated sectarian groups view the Shi`a as heretics, and they regularly attack them.³⁷

This sectarian tension partly explains the movement of fighters from Pakistan to Syria. It has also reshaped the TTP's propaganda toward the Shi`a community in general.³⁸ A TTP-linked

15 Rania Abouzeid, "Inside the Battle for Assad's Heartland," al-Jazeera, August 28, 2013; Rania Abouzeid, "On Syria's Front Lines: A Night in the Field Clinic," al-Jazeera, August 28, 2013.

16 Personal interview, North Waziristan-based journalist who requested anonymity for security reasons, August 8, 2013.

17 Zahir Shah Sherazi, "First Batch of Fighters Reaches Syria, Confirms Pakistan Taliban," *Dawn*, July 16, 2013.

18 "Video Confirms Pakistani Taliban's Presence In Syria," The Middle East Media Research Institute, August 1, 2013.

19 Ibid.

20 Aqeel Yousafzai, "Taliban se muzakraat Hukmaran band gali mai," *Hum Shehri* [Lahore], September 9-15, 2013.

21 "Pakistan Taliban Say No shift to Syria," Fox News, July 16, 2013.

22 "Pakistan Denies Reports of Taliban Cell in Syria," *Dawn*, July 16, 2013.

23 Saima Mohsin and Joe Sterling, "Syrian Opposition Questions Taliban Rebel Role," CNN, July 19, 2013.

24 Mujeeb, "Pakistan Taliban 'Sets up a Base in Syria.'"

25 Personal interview, Aqeel Yousafzai, author of several books on militancy, Peshawar, Pakistan, August 2013.

26 "In New Video, Taliban Commanders Discuss Jihad Against America And The 'Crusader-Zionist Alliance'; Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan Described As International Organization," The Middle East Media Research Institute, January 9, 2013.

27 Ibid.

28 "Afghans, Pakistanis Training Militants in Mali: Nigger," *Dawn*, June 8, 2012.

29 "Al Qaeda Bringing Pakistani Explosive Experts to Yemen, Claims Official," *Dawn*, August 10, 2013.

30 Andrew Clark and Declan Walsh, "Taliban Behind

Times Square Plot, Says US," *Guardian*, May 9, 2010.

31 "Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan Threaten Myanmar Over Rohingya," *Express Tribune*, July 26, 2012; "Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan Pledges to Fight in Kashmir, Implement Sharia in India," *Indian Express*, January 8, 2013.

32 Mujeeb, "Pakistan Taliban 'Sets up a Base in Syria.'"

33 Personal interview, Aqeel Yousafzai, author of several books on militancy, Peshawar, Pakistan, August 2013.

34 Personal interview, Ahmed Wali Mujeeb, a BBC journalist based in Islamabad, August 8, 2013.

35 "Sectarian Violence in Pakistan 1989-2013," South Asia Terrorism Portal, undated.

36 Huma Yusuf, "Sectarian Violence: Pakistan's Greatest Security Threat?" Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, July 2012.

37 Banned Shi`a militant groups in Pakistan, such as Sipah-i-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP), target the Sunni community as retribution. See personal interview, Ahmed Wali Mujeeb, a BBC journalist based in Islamabad, August 8, 2013; Faraz Khan, "Sectarian Hit-Men Move from Killing Individuals to Targeting Families: Police," *Express Tribune*, September 28, 2012.

38 Personal interview, North Waziristan-based journal-

leader said that they have planned more attacks against the Shi'a community in Pakistan to seek revenge for attacks by Shi'a and Alawites against Sunnis in Syria and Iraq.³⁹ Tehreek-ul-Ansar, a wing of the TTP, claimed responsibility for the July 26, 2013, twin suicide attacks in Parachinar town of Kurram Agency that killed 57 Shi'a, saying that the operation was in revenge for the "killing of Sunnis in Syria."⁴⁰

Tactically, it is not immediately clear how the small Pakistani contingent in Syria, used to fighting in the mountainous Pakistan-Afghanistan border region, could help rebels in the streets of Syrian cities.⁴¹ Analysts, however, believe that the Pakistani militants could provide bomb-making skills, and guerrilla warfare and suicide bombing training to Syrian militants.⁴² Most Pakistani fighters are poorly educated, under employed and marginalized youth, and it is feared that al-Qa`ida's leadership in Syria could easily motivate them by paying money for more violence.⁴³

The TTP and al-Qa`ida have a symbiotic relationship, and sending Pakistani militants to Syria will likely be seen as an act of loyalty toward al-Qa`ida's affiliates.⁴⁴ This mutual cooperation likely gives the TTP access to al-Qa`ida's global terrorist network and the operational experience of its members.⁴⁵

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ist who requested anonymity for security reasons, August 8, 2013.

39 "Parachinar Bombings: Death Toll Rises to 57," *Pakistan Today*, July 27, 2013.

40 Ibid.

41 Jason Burke, "Syria Conflict: Why Pakistani Taliban is Pledging Support for Rebels," *Guardian*, July 14, 2013.

42 Personal interview, North Waziristan-based journalist who requested anonymity for security reasons, August 8, 2013.

43 Burke.

44 Personal interview, North Waziristan-based journalist who requested anonymity for security reasons, August 8, 2013.

45 Personal interview, Aqeel Yousafzai, author of several books on militancy, Peshawar, Pakistan, August 2013.

AQAP's Resilience in Yemen

By Andrew Michaels and Sakhr Ayyash

IN THE SPRING of 2011, militants affiliated with al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) seized control of towns in Yemen's southern Abyan Province.¹ This land grab occurred at the same time that Sana`a-based political forces were mired in a power struggle between the supporters of then-President Ali Abdullah Salih and a number of regime defectors ignited by Arab Spring-inspired protests. With the Yemeni armed forces split, and military leaders distracted by events in the capital, the AQAP-affiliated fighters were able to cement their control of Abyan, taking on the role of governance and meting out their strict interpretation of Shari`a (Islamic law) as they declared a succession of Islamic emirates in the name of Ansar al-Shari`a (The Supporters of Islamic Law). Both locals and Yemeni government officials largely spoke of the two as interchangeable from the start, while statements from AQAP figures appeared to cast Ansar al-Shari`a as an alias for their group.²

The militants would not be dislodged from their strongholds in the province until more than a year later in June 2012 after a sustained offensive by Yemeni troops and local tribal fighters backed

1 The takeover of Zinjibar came as clashes between anti-government tribesmen and pro-Salih troops plunged much of Sana`a into urban warfare.

2 On the eve of its emergence in April 2011, Shaykh Adil al-Abab, AQAP's fourth-ranking figure, described Ansar al-Shari`a as "the name...we use to introduce ourselves in areas where we work." Ansar al-Shari`a's leaders universally delivered oaths of allegiance to AQAP *amir* Nasir al-Wahayshi. Yet even if a number of the details of the relationship between AQAP and Ansar al-Shari`a continue to fuel discussion, the debate has largely focused on whether the latter constitutes a formal arm of the former or a simple rebranding. Even analysts who have focused on apparent differences in the shape of the two groups' operations have still cast Ansar al-Shari`a as a subordinate organization inextricably tied to AQAP. For its part, the U.S. government directly designated Ansar al-Shari`a an alias for AQAP in October 2012. For more details, see Christopher Swift, "Arc of Convergence: Ansar al-Sharia, AQAP and the Struggle for Yemen," *CTC Sentinel* 5:6 (2012).

by U.S. airstrikes.³ At the time, it was hailed as a crucial victory, as Yemeni government officials trumpeted the "liberation" of Abyan from Ansar al-Shari`a fighters.⁴ Yet the year that has followed has made such declarations appear premature. Since Ansar al-Shari`a abandoned control of its former strongholds in western Abyan, they have expanded their presence across the country, showing few tangible signs of struggling to find areas of relative refuge, even amidst continuing U.S. airstrikes carried out by drone aircraft.⁵

Outside of Yemen, discussions of AQAP often tend to focus on a handful of the group's most prominent members. This attention is far from unwarranted. AQAP's current leadership has proven uniquely skilled, demonstrating a great degree of coherence.⁶ Yet it contrasts with the relative lack of attention such figures receive in Yemen itself, where focus instead falls on the various parts of the country where the group has been able to find refuge.

This article reexamines AQAP's "defeat" in Abyan Province and identifies some of the factors behind the group's resilience in Yemen. It finds that AQAP's unified leadership and ideology notwithstanding, it must deal with differing regional dynamics as it aims to find and solidify areas to operate in Yemen. The importance of the latter certainly does not negate that of the former. Indeed, the developments of the past year would appear to demonstrate that AQAP's strength lies in its adaptability, which is ultimately fueled by its leadership's knowledge of the differing dynamics of areas across the country and their ability to apply it to their larger strategy.

3 "Yemen Retakes Ground in Push on Islamist Rebels," Reuters, June 11, 2013.

4 Adam Baron, "Yemen's Defense Minister Visits Zinjibar, Jaar - Freed from al Qaida-linked Militants' Control," McClatchy Newspapers, June 13, 2012.

5 The end of 2011 marked the start of a sharp uptick in U.S. military actions in Yemen. The New America Foundation recorded 79 U.S. airstrikes in Yemen during the Obama administration.

6 See also Gabriel Koehler-Derrick ed., *A False Foundation: AQAP, Tribes, and Ungoverned Spaces in Yemen* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2011).

The Case of Abyan Province

The example of Abyan Province is particularly instructive. What was cast at the time as a “defeat” of Ansar al-Shari`a fighters appears in hindsight as a “strategic retreat,” in consonance with the claims of the group itself.⁷ The military onslaught the group faced in the spring of 2012 may have spurred them to forsake control of former strongholds, but rather than abandoning the province it appears that they instead shifted their presence.

As reports noted at the time, the bulk of fighters were able to flee the towns of Jaar and Zinjibar with relative ease, in most cases with their weapons, while many of those native to the towns were able to slip back into normal society.⁸ Security officials acknowledge that AQAP and Ansar al-Shari`a cells remain even in towns and villages that are ostensibly in the hands of the government or local anti-AQAP tribal militias.⁹ These fighters maintain a significant presence near the towns of Jaar and Mudiyya, which were both focal points of last year’s military push, even if the bulk of fighters in the province have taken to higher ground.¹⁰ The center of gravity has shifted to the mountains of al-Maraqisha, and the AQAP stronghold of al-Mahfad in the province’s east, which grant the fighters comparative safety in its rugged terrain.¹¹ They have continued to stage intermittent attacks on tribal and military targets in population centers in the province’s west,¹² while giving up the “liability” of

having to defend the easily penetrable flat farmlands surrounding Jaar and its environs.¹³

In consort with its activities outside the province, AQAP’s moves since Ansar al-Shari`a’s defeat in Abyan suggest a shift away from any aims to hold land. Instead, AQAP appears to have reverted to its pre-2011 strategy, which privileged operations space over any aspiration of governance.¹⁴

Resilience

In that sense, the fruits of last spring’s offensive bear little resemblance to a conclusive defeat for AQAP as a whole. Militants have retained longstanding areas of relative refuge, while expanding their presence to new parts of the country, most notably the central province of Bayda and the eastern province of Hadramawt.¹⁵ Ongoing U.S. airstrikes have eliminated a handful of AQAP’s top leaders—most notably its former deputy, Said al-Shihri, and its top cleric, Adil al-Abab—but Yemeni security officials question claims that airstrikes have decisively hampered the group’s activities.¹⁶ These officials instead ground AQAP’s resilience in its ability to capitalize on changing dynamics in different parts of the country, seeking out havens in isolated areas where government control is nearly absent and resentment of Sana`a is rife, largely avoiding confrontations with powerful tribes and manipulating local discord to strengthen its position.

This comes in spite of claims that Yemen’s current president, Abd Rabu Mansur Hadi, has proved a far more dedicated counterterrorism partner than his predecessor, Ali Abdullah Salih, since taking office in February 2012.¹⁷ While U.S. officials largely described Salih as a crucial American ally, the former president’s critics and political opponents had long argued that he exploited the threat of al-Qa`ida for his own political benefit.¹⁸ In contrast to Salih’s quiet granting of permission, Hadi has openly acknowledged—and backed—the U.S. policy of launching airstrikes at targets in Yemen.¹⁹ Local analysts have largely corroborated U.S. and Yemeni government claims that Hadi’s time in office has seen increased commitment and improved bilateral cooperation in the battle against AQAP.²⁰

Yet even those who note improvements since the transfer of power counter that the current counterterrorism strategy employed in the country remains critically flawed, arguing that an apparent focus on simply targeting militants has come at the expense of devoting the necessary attention and effort to combating the larger factors that have given AQAP room to grow. Analysts and regular Yemenis alike argue that the battle against AQAP must also tackle longstanding issues like underdevelopment, high levels of unemployment and widespread resentment of the central government in rural areas spurred by uneven access to basic services like electricity and healthcare.²¹ They argue that current initiatives from international actors aimed at tackling such problems, most notably through the Friends of Yemen group, are insufficient.

7 A statement attributed to Ansar al-Shari`a released after the group’s withdrawal explicitly stated that they “did not retreat from weakness, but rather to turn the pages of the enemy.” See “Al-Qaeda and the Political Transition Process in Yemen,” al-Jazeera Center for Studies, August 29, 2012; Baron, “Yemen’s Defense Minister Visits Zinjibar, Jaar – Freed from al Qaida-linked Militants’ Control.”

8 Kelly McEvers, “Yemen Works to Reclaim Al Qaeda’s Territory,” National Public Radio, June 13, 2012

9 Personal interview, local Yemeni security official, August 2013. See also Andrew Hammond, “Al Qaeda Goes Underground in US-driven Crackdown,” Reuters, October 23, 2012.

10 Ibid.

11 Personal interviews, two local figures familiar with AQAP operations in the region, August 2013; “US Drone Kills Six Al Qaeda Militants, Says Yemeni Military Source,” Agence France-Presse, July 28, 2013.

12 “AQAP Attacks Popular Committees in Lawdar,”

Sada Aden, August 12, 2013; “8 Killed in U.S. Drone Strike in Southern Yemen,” Xinhua, June 1, 2013; “Two Killed in Battle Between AQAP and Popular Committees,” *Yemen Times*, September 5, 2013.

13 Personal interview, Abyan-based local official, Sana`a, Yemen, September 2013.

14 Personal interview, Sana`a-based analyst specializing in AQAP-related issues, Sana`a, Yemen, August 2013.

15 See, for example, the following incidents: “Air Raids in Yemen Kill At Least 33 Suspected al-Qaeda Militants: Officials,” al-Arabiya, March 10, 2002; “Al-Qaeda Confirms Death of Yemen Leader Qaeed al-Dhahab,” al-Arabiya, September 15, 2013; “Terrorism Operations Grow in Hadramout,” *Yemen Times*, March 5, 2012; “Al-Qaeda Seizes Territory in Yemen’s Hadramawt,” *Daily Star* [Beirut], May 24, 2013.

16 Mark Mazzetti, “No. 2 Leader of Al Qaeda in Yemen is Killed,” *New York Times*, January 24, 2013; “Al-Qa`ida Leader Killed in Shabwa,” al-Masdar, October 20, 2012.

17 See John Brennan’s speech at the Council on Foreign Relations on August 8, 2012.

18 See, for example, Gregory Johnsen, “Losing Yemen,” *Foreign Policy*, November 5, 2012.

19 Scott Shane, “Yemen’s Leader Praises U.S. Drone Strikes,” *New York Times*, September 29, 2012.

20 Personal interview, Yemeni political analyst, Sana`a, Yemen, August 2013.

21 Gregory D. Johnsen, “How We Lost Yemen,” *Foreign Policy*, August 6, 2013.

Local Factors Determine AQAP's Success

Local factors tend to govern both the absence and presence of AQAP militants. AQAP and the vociferously anti-American Huthi²² rebels, who control the bulk of the provinces of Sa`da and al-Jawf, may share a common enemy in the Yemeni government, but their relationship is just as adversarial. Statements from AQAP have condemned the Zaydi Shi`a Huthis in starkly sectarian terms, taking responsibility for attacks on the group in both Sa`da and al-Jawf.²³ The Huthis openly cast AQAP as an “American creation” manipulated by political and military powers in Sana`a.²⁴ Regardless, local officials say the group’s strength currently functions as a bulwark against potential AQAP expansion in areas under their control.²⁵ While Sa`da and al-Jawf are strategically located along Yemen’s border with Saudi Arabia, AQAP’s presence in both provinces remains light, largely concentrated in isolated villages where locals have adopted Saudi-influenced brands of Sunni Islam.²⁶ AQAP’s small numbers belie the significance such border areas hold for the group: the loss of key transit routes in the border province of al-Jawf would rob AQAP of its primary link to Saudi Arabia.²⁷

To the south, in mountainous districts in the north of the province of Lahj, armed locals have largely been able to prevent AQAP fighters from gaining ground.²⁸ This area is a stronghold of hard line factions of Yemen’s secessionist Southern Movement,²⁹

or Hiraak. Similar to the Huthis, the Southern Movement blames AQAP’s strength on Sana`a-based elites, stating that the government’s incompetence and collusion with extremists effectively left them with no other option but to defend themselves against AQAP and Ansar al-Shari`a militants, which southern secessionists see as both a threat to their way of life and to their aims of gaining independence.³⁰ The mobilization of separatist-leaning tribesmen, largely spearheaded by Mohamed Ali Ahmed, a prominent Southern Movement figure, is also widely acknowledged to have played a key role in the battle against Ansar al-Shari`a in Abyan.³¹

Local analysts explain AQAP’s current actions in the context of a general strategy to seek out areas where government control is absent and local tribal leaders are apathetic or weak. The group’s expansion in the area of Qayfa and the town of Ra`da in the west of the central province of Bayda are a notable exception to the latter, coming as a result of support from a number of key members of the al-Dahab family—powerful and locally respected tribal elites.³² Al-Qa`ida-affiliated fighters led by one member of the family, Tariq al-Dahab, took control of the town of Ra`da in early 2012 before agreeing

former People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), which was an independent country until Yemen’s 1990 unification. While rooted in the rights-based protests that accompanied its 2007 emergence, the demand has increasingly shifted to the return of full independence, even if some factions continue to express openness regarding a federal solution. The mountains of the provinces of al-Dhale and Lahj are largely seen as the heartland of hard line factions while a disproportionate number of Southern Movement leaders in Abyan, the birthplace of President Hadi, have shown a comparative willingness to work with the current government.

30 Personal interview, Southern Movement leader, Aden, Yemen, February 2013. Many supporters of the Southern Movement blame Sana`a-based political forces for the spread of hard line interpretations of Islam, which they cast as part of a deliberate effort to eliminate the south’s perceived cultural differences, a result of British influence, and the effects of the PDRY’s three decades of socialist governance.

31 Farea al-Muslimi, “Returned South Yemen Leader: ‘Peaceful Struggle’ May Yet Win,” *al-Monitor*, September 11, 2012.

32 “Tariq al Dahab, Yemen Al Qaeda Leader, Dead, Says Terrorist Group,” Associated Press, February 20, 2012.

to withdraw a week later after tribal mediation.³³ Yet the group maintains a strong presence in the al-Dahabs’ stronghold in al-Manaseh.³⁴ The allegiance of some members of the al-Dahab family has brought with it the allegiance of many local tribesmen—a result of their loyalty to AQAP-aligned, Manaseh-based members of the al-Dahab family, rather than an endorsement of AQAP itself.³⁵ Regardless, locals say that the loyalty of many area tribesmen has held up even in the face of a government military offensive earlier this year, stating that many tribesmen fought alongside AQAP-affiliated fighters, viewing the Yemeni military’s battle against the militants as an unwelcome violation of their sovereignty.³⁶

The open cooperation of leading tribal figures in Bayda contrasts with the general state of affairs in most of the rest of the country. AQAP’s greatest asset in most areas where it maintains a presence is typically cast as local indifference: too weak to face the group on their own, locals will rarely confront it absent a reason to do so, whether in the form of incentives and support offered from the government or more prominent tribal leaders, or blowback from overly aggressive actions from AQAP affiliates themselves.³⁷ Locals in the central province of Marib have explained its longstanding AQAP presence by the absence of the central government’s control and militants’ ability—and willingness—to quietly blend in.³⁸

A security official in Hadramawt explained the group’s recent expansion on similar issues, noting the lack of government presence in areas of the

33 “Al-Qaeda Gunmen Pull Out of Yemen Town,” *al-Arabiya*, January 25, 2012.

34 Personal interview, local security official, Sana`a, Yemen, August 2013; Francois-Xavier Tregan, “US Drone Strikes in Yemen Cast a Long Shadow Over Life on the Ground,” *Guardian*, July 23, 2013.

35 Personal interview, local tribal leader, Sana`a, Yemen, February 2013.

36 Adam Baron, “Yemen Moves Against Al Qaeda-linked Fighters after Hostage Talks Falter,” *McClatchy Newspapers*, January 28, 2013.

37 Personal interview, Sana`a-based political analyst, Sana`a, Yemen, August 2013.

38 Personal interview, local tribal leader, Sana`a, Yemen, June 2013.

22 The Huthis are a Zaydi Shi`a insurgent group based in far northern Yemen known for their acerbic slogan, “God is Great, Death to America, Death to America, Damn the Jews, Victory to Islam.” The target of six wars waged by the central government during the final decade of Salih’s rule, they have appeared open, if skeptical, to political inclusion efforts undertaken since Hadi took office, retaining their well-armed militias.

23 “Al-Qa`ida Claims Responsibility for the Attack Against Huthis,” *al-Masdar*, November 28, 2010.

24 See, for example, www.ansaruallah.com/news/2925.

25 Personal interview, Huthi-aligned Sa`da-based official, Sana`a, Yemen, October 2012.

26 Ibid.

27 Personal interview, Yemeni local journalist from al-Jawf Province, Sana`a, Yemen, October 2012.

28 Joseph Logan, “Yemeni Secessionist Dangles Pledge to Fight Al Qaeda,” *Reuters*, May 17, 2012.

29 The Southern Movement is a fractious coalition of differing factions calling for a return to autonomy in the

province that host AQAP activity and the passive response of locals who feel too weak to fight back.³⁹ Since the offensive in Abyan, analysts argue, the group appears to have focused on avoiding inflaming local sentiment. Militants in Hadramawt, for example, have directed offensive actions largely at security officials.⁴⁰ This has made it all the easier for AQAP to capitalize on resentment of U.S. airstrikes; by presenting themselves as a benign force to locals, the group is able to shift blame for violence to the Yemeni and U.S. governments, casting them as the belligerent parties.

Conclusion

Hailed as a victory at the time, in hindsight Ansar al-Shari`a's abandonment of its former strongholds in Abyan seems to have been more of a temporary setback than a crippling defeat. AQAP has responded to its losses by shifting strategy, going so far as to expand its presence to new parts of Yemen in the year that has followed. While U.S. airstrikes have had some success in targeting the group's key leaders, they have shown no signs of inflicting a debilitating blow.⁴¹

In accordance with its reputation, AQAP has shown a continued ability to adapt, one that appears to be fueled by knowledge of differing dynamics across the country. In context, events in Abyan ultimately constitute one chapter in a long and continuing narrative.

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Bilal al-Berjawi and the Shifting Fortunes of Foreign Fighters in Somalia

By Raffaello Pantucci

ON SEPTEMBER 21, 2013, al-Shabab militants attacked an upscale shopping mall in Nairobi, the Kenyan capital. The brazen operation comes in the aftermath of al-Shabab leader Ahmed "Mukhtar Abu al-Zubayr" Godane's consolidation of power. In June, Godane swept aside a raft of senior leaders in the group. His power grab marked a watershed event in a period of dramatic turmoil for al-Shabab.

One individual, Bilal al-Berjawi, whose death may have come as part of an early expression of this schism, returned to public attention when al-Shabab published a number of videos and materials celebrating him in early 2013. A British citizen who was drawn to Somalia before al-Shabab formally existed, he rose through the ranks of al-Shabab and the foreign fighter cell linked to al-Qa`ida to become a figure who was reportedly second only to the head of al-Qa`ida's East Africa operations, Fazul Abdullah Muhammad (also known as Fadil Harun). Al-Berjawi's death in January 2012 reportedly triggered tensions within al-Shabab, culminating in Godane's takeover earlier this year. Yet al-Shabab emphasized that al-Berjawi's death was the product of Western intelligence efforts, rather than an internal purge.¹

The accuracy of al-Shabab's claims in the videos remain to be proven, but the releases provide an interesting view on current developments within al-Shabab as well as illuminating al-Berjawi's role in the group and his narrative as an epigraph for foreigners drawn to al-Shabab.

This article offers an in-depth look into al-Berjawi's life, as well as some thoughts on how he may have become enmeshed within the contingent of al-Shabab that has been sidelined. Al-Berjawi's death, the reported death

of American al-Shabab fighter Omar Hammami alongside another Briton,² the death of long-time al-Shabab leader Ibrahim al-Afghani, the disappearance of Mukhtar Robow, and Hassan Dahir Aweys' decision to turn himself in to authorities all point to a change within the organization that seems to have been punctuated by the ambitious attack in Nairobi. The ultimate result is still developing, but al-Berjawi's rise and fall provides a useful window with which to look at the role of foreigners in the conflict in Somalia.

The Life of Bilal al-Berjawi

Bilal al-Berjawi was a Lebanon-born, British-educated young man also known as Abu Hafsa.³ Born in Beirut in September 1984, his parents brought him to the United Kingdom when he was a baby.⁴ Raised in west London, he lived as a young man near an Egyptian family whose son, Mohammed Sakr, became his close friend. Characterized as "two peas in a pod" by fellow Somalia-based foreign jihadist Omar Hammami, al-Berjawi's and Sakr's stories seem closely intertwined.⁵ Sakr's family reported that the two men met as boys when Sakr was 12-years-old, and then lived adjacent to each other.⁶ Most references to the men in jihadist materials mention them as a pair.

In a martyrdom notice for al-Berjawi, al-Shabab said that he was from west London,⁷ while the BBC identified him as being from St. Johns Wood in the

² Tom Whitehead, Mike Pflanz and Ben Farmer, "British Terror Suspect Linked to 'White Widow' Samantha Lewthwaite Reportedly Killed," *Telegraph*, September 12, 2013. In fact, it is not clear whether the individual identified in the article was the same Briton killed alongside Hammami, although it seems clear that the *kunya* identifying him as British was correct (Osama al-Britani).

³ One Ugandan report also gave him the following pseudonyms: Hallway Carpet, Omar Yusuf and Bilal el Berjaour. See Barbara Among, "Police Foil Another Bomb Attack in Kampala," *New Vision*, September 25, 2010. An online biography released about al-Berjawi also mentioned he liked to use the name Abu Dujana.

⁴ Among; Chris Woods, "Parents of British Man Killed by US Drone Blame UK Government," *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, March 15, 2013.

⁵ This quote is based on a Twitter conversation between this author and the @abumamerican Twitter handle, April 19, 2013. Omar Hammami is believed to be the owner of that handle.

⁶ Woods.

⁷ "A Drone Strike Pronounces a Martyr."

³⁹ Personal interview, Hadramawt-based security official, Sana`a, Yemen, August 2013.

⁴⁰ Personal interview, security official, Sana`a, Yemen, August 2013.

⁴¹ White House counterterrorism adviser John Brennan said in 2012 that the United States is "very concerned about AQAP...it's the most active operational franchise." He also said that AQAP now had more than 1,000 members. See Paul Cruickshank, "Brennan on Bin Laden Raid, and 'Dangerous' Yemen," *CNN*, April 20, 2012.

¹ "A Drone Strike Pronounces a Martyr," al-Shabab, January 21, 2012.

northwest of the city.⁸ A community worker who knew al-Berjawi in his teenage years said that he was involved in teenage gang violence in west London, specifically in clashes between Irish gangs and Muslim youth in the area.⁹ He was not particularly religious, although he appeared to be a contemplative young man.¹⁰ He had a wife of Somali origin who he married when he was 19- or 20-years-old, and a child who was conceived after he had risen up the ranks of al-Qa`ida's East Africa cell.¹¹

According to a longer martyrdom notice published almost a year after his death as part of a series called "Biographies of the Flags of the Martyrs in East Africa,"¹² al-Berjawi was trained by al-Qa`ida operatives Fazul Abdullah Mohammad and Salah Ali Salah Nabhan when he first arrived in Somalia in 2006.¹³ Under their tutelage, he seems to have flourished, although when the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) fled as a result of the Ethiopian invasion, al-Berjawi returned to the United Kingdom to fundraise and find ways to send money back to East Africa.¹⁴ Al-Berjawi's martyr biography praised him in this role, calling him "brilliant" and able to set up many profitable projects.¹⁵ According to his martyrdom video released by al-Shabab's media wing, after the release of his written biography, he decided to travel back to Lebanon from London.¹⁶

In February 2009, al-Berjawi and Sakr headed to Kenya, telling their families their intention was to go on a "safari."¹⁷

8 Secunder Kermani, "Drone Victim's Somalia Visits Probed," BBC, May 30, 2013.

9 Personal interview, Tam Hussein, community worker who knew al-Berjawi, London, August 2013.

10 Ibid.

11 Woods.

12 For the entire series "Biographies of the Flags of the Martyrs in East Africa," see www.jihadology.net/category/biography-of-the-flags-of-the-martyrs-in-east-africa.

13 See "Biography of the Martyred Figures in East Africa 4: 'Abd Allah Fadil al-Qamari,'" available on Jihadology.net, which seems to draw on Fazul Mohammad's own published biography, "War on Islam," and interviews with individuals like al-Berjawi.

14 "Biography of the Martyred Figures in East Africa 5: Bilal al-Birjawi al-Lubnani (Abu Hafs)," available on Jihadology.net.

15 Ibid.

16 This video is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPQGhZaxD5A&feature=youtu.be.

17 Woods.

They were detained in Nairobi because they "aroused the suspicions" of a hotel manager in Mombasa.¹⁸ Both were deported back to the United Kingdom (as British passport holders) and told different accounts of their actions to awaiting security officials.¹⁹ When Mohammed Sakr's father confronted his son about his actions, Sakr said, "Daddy, it's finished, it will never happen again. It's all done and dusted."²⁰

By October 2009, the men decided to try to return to Somalia, and this time they were able to evade detection and slip out of the United Kingdom along with a third man. According to the "Biographies of the Flags of the Martyrs in East Africa," they had to travel through a number of countries before they arrived in Somalia.²¹ In November, they were reported by Ugandan authorities as being at the heart of a manhunt for individuals allegedly plotting terrorist acts in the country.²² The two were identified alongside a third British national named Walla Eldin Abdel Rahman—a name that corresponds with British court documents.²³ Al-Berjawi, in particular, was identified as having three passports with him.²⁴

According to his martyr biography, having returned to Baidoa in Somalia, al-Berjawi joined a camp and trained diligently alongside others, undertaking "difficult assignments" despite being reported as having a stomach condition.²⁵ He was described as being supportive of his colleagues and a lover of battles. As time passed, he seemed to have assumed greater responsibilities, helping to supply forces (with items such as clothing and weapons) and to take on responsibility for tending to families left behind by fallen warriors.²⁶ In early 2010, Mohammed

18 *BX v. The Secretary of State for the Home Department*, Royal Courts of Justice, 2010.

19 Ibid.

20 Woods.

21 "Biography of the Martyred Figures in East Africa 5: Bilal al-Birjawi al-Lubnani (Abu Hafs)."

22 Milton Olupot, "Security Hunts for Somali Terrorists," *New Vision*, November 8, 2009.

23 *J1 v. The Secretary of State for the Home Department*, Royal Courts of Justice, 2013.

24 Olupot.

25 "Biography of the Martyred Figures in East Africa 5: Bilal al-Birjawi al-Lubnani (Abu Hafs)."

26 Ibid.

Sakr called his parents from Somalia to reassure them that he was doing well.²⁷

In July 2010, a cell linked to al-Shabab conducted a double suicide bombing in Kampala, Uganda, on two bars where people watched the soccer World Cup final. The attack claimed approximately 74 lives.²⁸ According to one report in the Ugandan press, al-Berjawi, Sakr and Rahman were detected entering the country in July 2010, although it remains unclear the exact role that they played, if any, in the Kampala attack.²⁹

By this point, al-Berjawi was repeatedly referred to in the Ugandan press as being a direct deputy to Fazul Mohammad, the head of al-Qa`ida's operations in East Africa, although he seems to have been close to others in al-Shabab as well.³⁰ The "Biographies of the Flags of the Martyrs in East Africa" identified him as being in regular direct contact with Fazul, and even helping him get into Somalia at one point.³¹ A biography of Fazul released by al-Shabab and statements from American jihadist Omar Hammami corroborated this, with the biography stating that al-Berjawi was in regular contact with Fazul³² and Hammami claiming in an interview that Fazul kept abreast of developments in Somalia through contacts with al-Berjawi and Sakr, both of whom "were very close to Fazul at the time prior to his martyrdom."³³ In September 2010, the British home secretary sent letters to al-Berjawi's and Sakr's parents revoking their citizenships "on grounds of conduciveness to the public good."³⁴

27 Woods.

28 Elias Biryabarema, "Uganda Bombs Kill 74, Islamists Claim Attack," Reuters, July 12, 2010.

29 Among.

30 In fact, it is not entirely clear how separate the two organizations were at this point. The al-Qa`ida in East Africa cell seems to have been quite small and largely part of al-Shabab's community.

31 "Biography of the Martyred Figures in East Africa 5: Bilal al-Birjawi al-Lubnani (Abu Hafs)."

32 "Biography of the Martyred Figures in East Africa 4: 'Abd Allah Fadil al-Qamari,'" available on Jihadology.net.

33 "Answers to the Open Interview with the Mujahid Shaykh [Omar Hammami] Abu Mansur al-Amiriki," The Islamic World Issues Study Center, May 2013, available at Jihadology.net.

34 Woods.

In June 2011, a drone strike that may have been targeting senior al-Shabab figure Ibrahim al-Afghani supposedly injured al-Berjawi.³⁵ This came two weeks after Fazul took a wrong turn down a road in Mogadishu and drove straight into a Somali government roadblock. According to al-Shabab's biography of Fazul, in the wake of his death concerns started to mount about the circumstances involved, and a number of al-Shabab commanders, alongside al-Berjawi, Sakr and others, fled the country.³⁶ In this version of events, as the group fled Somalia, they were targeted by the drone that injured al-Berjawi.³⁷ After being injured in the drone strike, al-Berjawi snuck into Kenya to recuperate with Sakr's assistance.³⁸

It is unclear at what point al-Berjawi returned to Somalia, but by early 2012 he seems to have been back in the country and is described in the regional press as having assumed Fazul's position as the leader of al-Qa`ida in Somalia³⁹—although given he had been injured so soon after Fazul's death, it is not clear how much he would have been able to achieve in this role. Nevertheless, this would have made him a target for foreign intelligence services and, according to a video confession produced by al-Shabab and released by al-Kataib that was posted in May 2013 seemingly to affirm the narrative behind al-Berjawi's death, it is at this time that unspecified foreign intelligence services allegedly recruited a young Somali named Isaac Omar Hassan.⁴⁰ According to Hassan's confession to al-Shabab, he was recruited by foreign intelligence services to help

them track al-Berjawi so that he could be killed in a drone strike.⁴¹ Hassan said that al-Berjawi was the first person that the handlers asked him about.⁴²

In Hassan's telling, he recruited a friend, Yasin Osman Ahmed, who was to drive al-Berjawi that day.⁴³ Al-Berjawi allegedly called Ahmed on the morning of January 21, 2012, at around 9 or 10 AM as he wanted to go to the market to purchase a firearm.⁴⁴ Later, according to Hassan, al-Berjawi was driving to meet with the "amir of the mujahidin" when they stopped to make a phone call. It was at this point that the drone found its target, killing al-Berjawi.⁴⁵ In Hassan's confessional, a month later an almost identical scenario played out, but this time with him recruiting a third man called Abdirahman Osman to act as the person who supposedly led the drone to its targets: Mohammed Sakr and another group of foreign fighters.⁴⁶

Questions About Death

Bilal al-Berjawi's death seems to have sparked a wave of concern within the community of al-Qa`ida in East Africa and foreigners in al-Shabab. After al-Berjawi's death, hundreds of foreign fighters reportedly left Somalia. Shaykh Abuukar Ali Aden, an al-Shabab leader for Lower and Middle Jubba region, told Somalia Report that "yes, it is true that those brothers left us and went to Yemen due to some minor internal misunderstandings amongst ourselves. This started when we lost our brother Bilal al-Berjawi."⁴⁷ An emergency meeting was held almost immediately after al-Berjawi's death that was attended by al-Shabab leaders Ali Mohamed Rage, Hassan Dahir Aweys, Mukhtar Robow, Omar Hammami, Shaykh Fuad Mohammed Kalaf, and unidentified others.⁴⁸ Notably absent was Godane.⁴⁹ This seemed to echo another meeting that had been held prior to al-Berjawi's death in December

2011 when al-Shabab leaders "opposed to Godane" gathered in Baidoa.⁵⁰

Concerns seem to have focused around the fact that so many key players in al-Qa`ida's East Africa cell and the foreign fighter community were being removed from the battlefield in quick succession. The fact that Fazul died in such odd circumstances for a man of his caliber and training,⁵¹ followed by al-Berjawi's death, all seemed to suggest an internal purge. When Sakr and others were killed a month after al-Berjawi, this sense seemed to harden, with Omar Hammami considering Sakr's death "a strange incident."⁵² In between al-Berjawi's and Sakr's deaths, however, the new leader of al-Qa`ida, Ayman al-Zawahiri, announced al-Shabab's official merger with the terrorist group.

The exact details of this possible leadership dispute remain unclear. Yet the recent executions of Ibrahim al-Afghani and Sheikh Maalim Burhan,⁵³ the reported death of American Omar Hammami,⁵⁴ Hassan Dahir Aweys' decision to hand himself over to authorities in Mogadishu, and Mukhtar Robow's abrupt move into hiding⁵⁵ all indicate that whatever leadership struggle was underway has now come into the open with Godane emerging victorious. What role al-Berjawi played in this remains unclear, although it seems as though his death may have been a catalyst to precipitate subsequent events. The emergence of the video confession produced by al-Shabab seems a conscious effort to claim al-Berjawi's death was solely the product of external intelligence efforts, rather than due to an internal purge.⁵⁶

35 Thomas Joscelyn and Bill Roggio, "Senior Shabaab Commander Rumored to Have Been Killed in Recent Predator Strike," *The Long War Journal*, July 9, 2011.

36 "Biography of the Martyred Figures in East Africa 4: 'Abd Allah Fadil al-Qamari,'" available at Jihadology.net.

37 Ibid.

38 "Biography of the Martyred Figures in East Africa 5: Bilal al-Birjawi al-Lubnani (Abu Hafis)."

39 "Al Qaeda Leader Killed in Somalia Blast," *The Star* [Nairobi], January 24, 2012.

40 This confession video was purportedly filmed by al-Shabab. It is worth noting that in the video the group alternates between accusing the CIA or Britain's MI6 of being responsible for handling Hassan. The video was posted in May 2013 and is available at http://ia600707.us.archive.org/22/items/3d-f7dhrhm-2/SoBeware2_HQ.m4v.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Rashid Nuune, "Al Qaeda, al-Shabaab Pledge Allegiance...Again," *Somalia Report*, February 9, 2012.

48 Mohammed Odowa, "Al Barjawi Assassination Widens Rift in Shabaab," *Somalia Report*, January 23, 2012.

49 Ibid.

50 "Al Qaeda Commander Killed in Somalia Blast," *The Star*, January 24, 2012.

51 It is worth noting that in the East Africa martyrs biography about Berjawi, Fazul's death is characterized as being a "planned" assassination, suggesting it was not an accident.

52 This detail is based on a Twitter conversation between this author and the @abumamerican Twitter handle, April 19, 2013. Omar Hammami is believed to be the owner of that handle.

53 "Godane Loyalists Reportedly Execute al-Shabaab Leader Ibrahim al-Afghani," *Sabahi*, June 28, 2013.

54 Whitehead et al.

55 Hassan M. Abukar, "Somalia: The Godane Coup and the Unraveling of al-Shabaab," *African Arguments*, July 3, 2013.

56 This could certainly be true as al-Berjawi clearly was a

Al-Berjawi's Links to Other Militants

What led Bilal al-Berjawi to fight in Somalia is uncertain. His decision to train in Somalia in 2006 when the ICU was in power suggests he was part of a larger community of London radicals who were drawn to Somalia before al-Shabab emerged as a powerful entity. The fact that he had a Somali wife likely acted as a stimulant to go to Somalia, rather than to Iraq or Afghanistan, which were popular destinations among British Islamists at the time. These individuals were part of the radical scene in London that were drawn by messages advanced by radical preachers who circled around the "Londonistan" community. Al-Berjawi was further connected, at least peripherally, to a group linked to the network that attempted to carry out a terrorist attack on London's transportation system on July 21, 2005.

The links to this cell can be found through an individual mentioned in UK court documents as "J1." An Ethiopian national born in 1980, J1 reportedly moved to the United Kingdom with his family in 1990 and is currently believed to be fighting deportation to Ethiopia.⁵⁷ He was part of a group that attended camps in the United Kingdom run by Mohammed Hamid, an older radical figure who took over responsibilities for the community around Finsbury Park after Abu Hamza al-Masri was taken into custody in 2003.⁵⁸

In December 2004, J1 was picked up by police in Scotland near where Hamid was running a training camp, far away from their residences in London.⁵⁹ A former crack cocaine addict who had founded the al-Koran bookshop on Chatsworth Road, East London, Mohammed Hamid is currently in jail having been convicted of soliciting murder and providing terrorist training.⁶⁰ Most notoriously, in May 2004 he ran a training camp in Cumbria where four of the July 21, 2005, bombers attended.⁶¹ Also at

focus of Western intelligence efforts.

⁵⁷ *J1 v. The Secretary of State for the Home Department*.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Duncan Gardham, "Airlines Plot: Al-Qaeda Mastermind 'is Still Alive,'" *Telegraph*, September 10, 2009.

⁶¹ Dominic Casciani, "Top Extremist Recruiter is Jailed,"

the camp was a pair of men who were later detected to have gone to Somalia in May 2005 with three other friends as part of what security services assessed was "for purposes relating to terrorism."⁶² J1 admitted knowing the men had gone to Somalia, although he claimed he thought it was for "religious purposes."⁶³

Around a month later, on July 21, 2005, J1 was in telephone contact with Hussain Osman—one of the men responsible for the attempted London bombings that day (also present at Mohammed Hamid's camp).⁶⁴ His role in al-Berjawi's tale is similar to that with the May 2005 group that went to Somalia. According to court documents, by 2009 J1 was a "significant member of a group of Islamist extremists in the UK" and in this role he provided support for al-Berjawi, Sakr and a third acquaintance when they went to Somalia in late 2009.⁶⁵

Conclusion

The narrative around al-Berjawi shows the shifting relationship between al-Shabab and al-Qa`ida's East Africa cell. His travel to the region in 2006, and then again in 2009, was during the period when jihad in East Africa was of great appeal to Western aspirants seeking jihadist adventures. The emergence of the ICU that at first seemed to emulate the Taliban provided inspiration that was then spurred on with the invasion of Somalia by U.S.-supported Ethiopian forces in 2006.⁶⁶ With the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces and the subsequent overstretch by al-Shabab, however, Somalia appears to have become a less welcoming place for foreigners

BBC, February 26, 2008.

⁶² *J1 v. The Secretary of State for the Home Department*.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ According to court documents: "In October 2009 Berjawi, Sakr and Rahman travelled from the UK to Somalia for the purpose of terrorist training and terrorist activity in Somalia. The appellant knew in advance about the travel plans of those three men and the purpose of their expedition." See *ibid*. Confirmation of support is provided through a separate court document: *J1 v. The Secretary of State for the Home Department*, "Deportation – Substantive (National Security) – Dismissed," 2011.

⁶⁶ It emulated the Taliban in the sense that it was an Islamically driven movement seeking to restore order to a land overrun by warlords.

seeking to advance a narrative of global jihad.⁶⁷

This is not to say that the jihad in Somalia no longer has its foreign adherents. The elusive Samantha Lewthwaite, the convert wife of July 7, 2005, bomber Jermaine Lindsay, remains at large in East Africa and is accused of being a key figure in al-Shabab cells outside Somalia.⁶⁸ Canadian passport holder Mahad Ali Dhore was among those involved in the attack on the Mogadishu Supreme Court in April 2013.⁶⁹ Most significantly, al-Shabab claimed that a number of foreign fighters—including Americans—participated in the recent Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi.⁷⁰

Yet Somalia has lost some of its luster, something that has been accelerated by the emergence of alternative battlefields like Syria or North Africa as places where young Western jihadist tourists can go. This is a situation that could reverse itself, but until some greater clarity is cast over Godane's power grab in the organization and the status of al-Shabab, it seems likely that fewer foreigners will be drawn to that battlefield. The life and times of Bilal al-Berjawi offer a window with which to see the waxing and waning appeal of East Africa for Western jihadists.

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⁶⁷ Most publicly, this has been seen in the struggle around the American Omar Hammami whose writings and online activity on YouTube and Twitter highlighted the disagreements between the various factions in al-Shabab, but traces of it can also be found in Bilal al-Berjawi's tale.

⁶⁸ Mike Pflanz, "White Widow Samantha Lewthwaite 'was Plotting to Free Jermaine Grant,'" *Telegraph*, March 13, 2013. It is worth noting, however, that it was her new husband, Habib Ghani, who died alongside Omar Hammami. See Whitehead et al.

⁶⁹ Michelle Shephard, "Probe Focuses on Canadian as Shabaab Leader of Somalia Courthouse Attack," *Toronto Star*, April 15, 2013.

⁷⁰ David Simpson and Arwa Damon, "Smoke Rises Over Besieged Kenya Mall," CNN, September 23, 2013.

The Current State of Mexico's Many Drug Cartels

By Malcolm Beith

IT IS TEMPTING to separate Mexico's drug cartels into six hierarchical groups, each competing for trafficking turf. The reality, however, is that the Sinaloa Federation, the Gulf Cartel, the Tijuana Cartel, the Juarez Cartel, Los Zetas and La Familia, not to mention several new offshoot organizations, are fluid, dynamic, for-profit syndicates that sometimes operate under the umbrella of what are effectively conglomerates but more often than not operate as independent, smaller-scale franchises.

This article examines the current state of the Sinaloa Federation, Los Zetas, and other Mexican cartels. It finds that due to law enforcement pressure in recent years, Mexico's drug trafficking organizations have increasingly splintered, and may well end up consolidated under the influence of the last cartel standing. That cartel would likely be the Sinaloa Federation, which remains the most powerful cartel in Mexico today.

The Sinaloa Federation

The Sinaloa Federation is the most powerful Mexican drug trafficking organization with the largest presence nationwide and globally. Based in the state of Sinaloa in northwestern Mexico, it has operatives in at least 17 Mexican states.¹ In recent years, its members are known to have operated in cities throughout the United States.² At the helm of the cartel is Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman Loera, and he is accompanied by several other key figures, among them Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada and Juan Jose Esparragoza "El Azul" Moreno.³ These three figures, in their 50s and 60s, have run the Sinaloa Federation through a hands-off, top-down management

1 "El Cártel de Sinaloa," *Milenio*, undated.

2 See National Drug Intelligence Center, U.S. Department of Justice, available at www.justice.gov/archive/ndic.

3 For details, see the U.S. Treasury Department's leadership chart for the Sinaloa Federation, available at www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/20120724_esparragoza_moreno_org.pdf.

style since the 1990s. While the cartel itself may employ as many as 100,000 operatives,⁴ the leadership is believed to rarely communicate directly with them, preferring instead to issue wide-ranging orders and allow the plaza chiefs—those in charge of specific trafficking zones—to run their operations like franchises. For this reason, the Sinaloa cartel has long been known as the Federation.

In 2008 and 2009, however, the Sinaloa Federation suffered its first major ruptures when the Beltran Leyva brothers and Edgar Valdez Villareal (also known as La Barbie) split off from Sinaloa to form their own independent outfits,⁵ the Beltran Leyva Organization and the Cartel del Pacifico Sur.⁶ As a result, one of the Beltran Leyva brothers and Villareal were arrested in 2008 and 2010 respectively, while another brother was killed in 2009.⁷ It is unclear whether Sinaloa leader Guzman and his inner circle informed the authorities of the three's locations as payback over the split, or whether they simply proved unable to run operations on their own. The Sinaloa Federation, however, would never be the same. While it would expand in size—domestically and internationally—it would suffer setbacks and lose clout near its home turf of Sinaloa and Durango, as well as in southwestern Mexico.⁸

Since 2008, dozens of high-level Sinaloa cartel lieutenants have been brought down by authorities, including Guzman's father-in-law and longtime associate, Ignacio Coronel Villareal (also known as Nacho Coronel), who was killed in a shootout in the central city of Guadalajara in July 2010, and Ismael Zambada's son Vicente Zambada Niebla, who is currently on trial in Chicago. The

4 This is the author's own estimate, based on arrests and the breakdown of official estimates of Mexicans involved in the drug trade. Also see "Hay 500 mil narcos: Revela Senado al Congreso Magnitud del crimen organizado," *El Universal*, August 9, 2008.

5 "El Ocaso de Los Beltran. Un operativo llevado a cabo por la Marina permitio que se terminara con uno de los grupos delictivos mas peligrosos," *Excelsior*, September 19, 2013.

6 "Detenido presunto lider del cartel del Pacifico Sur en el estado de Morelos," *EFE*, February 11, 2013.

7 "Cronologia narcotraficantes caidos en los ultimos anos," *El Universal*, July 15, 2013.

8 "Sicarios de los Beltran Leyva y Zetas atacan a gente del Chapo en Sonora," *Milenio*, July 2, 2010.

Sinaloa cartel has continued to expand in Mexico and globally, but has faced increasing pressure from rival groups, Los Zetas in particular.⁹ While it is no longer as effective as it once was, the Sinaloa Federation remains the most expansive, organized cartel operating in Mexico today.

Los Zetas

Los Zetas are Mexico's most lethal drug trafficking organization. Originally a tight-knit group of approximately 30 former members of a Mexican Special Forces unit who operated as the paramilitary wing for the Gulf Cartel, Los Zetas have grown exponentially since the early 2000s.¹⁰ True to their Special Forces origins, some of the recruits have received advanced weapons and communications training, which is what originally distinguished the group from other cartels in Mexico.

Nevertheless, today many Los Zetas members have had little training at all; since 2008, small groups of "thugs" sporting crew cuts and purporting to be members of Los Zetas have appeared in small towns in Mexico, quickly claiming the turf as their own. Los Zetas members have been involved in turf battles in Sinaloa cartel strongholds like the city of Culiacan and have been spotted as far south as Guatemala and Honduras.¹¹ Yet aside from a few apparent attempts to consolidate the multitudes of groups calling themselves Zetas, Los Zetas have remained splintered.¹²

The authorities have continually hampered Los Zetas' ability to use technology to communicate. In August 2012, for example, the military seized 15 communications installations,

9 For details on the Sinaloa Federation's international operations and activities, see Samuel Logan, "The Sinaloa Federation's International Presence," *CTC Sentinel* 6:4 (2013).

10 For a profile of Los Zetas, see Samuel Logan, "A Profile of Los Zetas: Mexico's Second Most Powerful Drug Cartel," *CTC Sentinel* 5:2 (2012).

11 "El Capturado Z-40 organizo a Los Zetas en Guatemala," *Associated Press*, July 18, 2013.

12 A founding member of Los Zetas, Marcos Carmona Hernandez (also known as "El Cabrito"), was arrested in the southern state of Oaxaca in March 2011, shortly after another founding Zeta member was killed in nearby Veracruz. This suggests that the northern-based leadership was trying to gain control of its membership in the south.

including a 50-foot telecom tower, in the northern state of Tamaulipas.¹³ In the past year, the authorities have also had success in arresting or killing some of the top Los Zetas leaders.¹⁴ On October 7, 2012, Los Zetas leader Heriberto Lazcano Lazcano, known as “El Lazca” or “Z-3” (indicating his high-rank within the original Zeta unit), was killed by the Mexican Navy.¹⁵ On July 15, 2013, Lazcano’s successor, Miguel Angel Trevino Morales (“Z-40”), was arrested in Tamaulipas without a shot being fired and reportedly with the help of U.S. intelligence.¹⁶ Law enforcement pressure during the majority of the Calderon administration was focused on Los Zetas and La Familia, in large part because these two groups were the most intent on executing indiscriminate acts of violence.¹⁷

Without these leaders, Los Zetas will likely remain a ragtag operation, intent on violence and willing to engage in almost any illicit activity for profit, but increasingly disorganized and, as a result, less in control of drug trafficking and less capable of undermining the authorities and the state.¹⁸ It is also likely that the Sinaloa Federation will repeat a move from its 2004 playbook and try to take control of the lucrative Nuevo Laredo trafficking corridor¹⁹

13 “Desmantelan una red de comunicacion de los Zetas,” *Excelsior*, August 24, 2012.

14 Ibid.

15 Randal C. Archibold, “Mexico Kills a Drug Kingpin, but the Body Gets Away,” *New York Times*, October 9, 2012.

16 Randal C. Archibold, “Drug Kingpin is Captured in Mexico Near Border,” *New York Times*, July 15, 2013; Tracy Wilkinson, “Leader of Zetas Drug Cartel Captured: ‘40’ May be Extradited to U.S.,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 2013.

17 The lack of obvious law enforcement pressure on other organizations, the Sinaloa Federation in particular, prompted accusations from journalists and government critics that the Calderon administration was protecting Sinaloa, or at the very least turning a blind eye to its activities. A string of high-profile arrests from 2009 until the present day have largely silenced these claims.

18 For more on this argument, see Samuel Logan, “The Future of Los Zetas after the Death of Heriberto Lazcano,” *CTC Sentinel* 5:10 (2012).

19 Nuevo Laredo is widely considered to be one of the most important trafficking routes from Mexico to the United States, as highways from Texas lead to every part of the United States. It is also less policed than the borders at Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez.

given the corner in which Los Zetas find themselves.²⁰

Mexico’s Other Cartels

There are more than a handful of other cartels operating in Mexico, but none on the level of the Sinaloa Federation or Los Zetas. There are already indications that the Sinaloa Federation may try to strike an alliance with the remnants of the Gulf Cartel, which, since the extradition of Osiel Cardenas Guillen in 2007 (he received a 25-year sentence in Houston in 2010), has been considerably weakened.²¹ Its members have been in constant conflict with Los Zetas, from Tamaulipas all the way to Guatemala. Once the most powerful drug trafficking organization on Mexico’s East Coast, the Gulf Cartel’s current level of influence is unclear. It is reasonable to assume it still controls the majority of drug trafficking operations in Tamaulipas, but it is impossible to be completely confident of the Gulf Cartel’s current condition given the fog that surrounds the criminal underworld in Tamaulipas.²²

Of the other groups, the Tijuana Cartel is perhaps the least menacing. Since the fall of the last of the group’s long-time leaders, the Arellano Felix brothers in 2008, the group has stayed largely off the radar. It is believed that a sister of the Arellano Felix brothers, Enedina, may be trying to run operations, but there are indications that the Sinaloa Federation has moved in on their territory.²³ A similar situation exists in Ciudad Juarez, where just one of the original Carrillo Fuentes brothers, Vicente, remains in charge of what used to be the powerful Juarez Cartel but is now an increasingly fluid operation that resembles gang-on-gang warfare more

20 For more on this, see Logan, “The Future of Los Zetas after the Death of Heriberto Lazcano.”

21 James C. McKinley, Jr., “Mexican Drug Kingpin Sentenced to 25 Years in Secret Hearing,” *New York Times*, February 25, 2010.

22 It is reasonable to assume that the Gulf Cartel controls the majority of drug trafficking operations in Tamaulipas because Los Zetas engages in risky endeavors like human trafficking and less profitable ventures like piracy in Tamaulipas. Los Zetas would probably not be involved in such activities if it dominated the drug trade in Tamaulipas. All historical research has shown that drug trafficking is so lucrative that if a group controls it, then it has no need for profit from other illicit activity.

23 “Tijuana ‘Cartel Boss’ Arellano Felix Extradited to US,” BBC, April 29, 2011.

than intra-cartel violence, with the high-level drug trafficking operations apparently conducted by members of the Sinaloa and Gulf cartels. In some ways, Sinaloa has always had a foot in Juarez: in the 1990s, Esparragoza Moreno was considered the “number three” for the Sinaloa Federation as well as the “number two” for the Juarez Cartel, even though the two organizations were officially rivals.²⁴

What remains in the rest of Mexico is a hodgepodge of offshoot groups that are increasingly staking their claim to disputed turf from Veracruz to Guadalajara to Acapulco. La Familia, a pseudo-religious group based in the central state of Michoacan which preached wholesome values all the while peddling methamphetamine on the side, has all but shattered under law enforcement pressure, but the so-called Knights Templar has risen in its place. The Knights Templar, like La Familia, operates behind a facade of pseudo-religiosity, calling into question just how separate it is from what was once La Familia. Given La Familia’s growth during the early years of the Felipe Calderon administration, it is unlikely the organization simply disappeared entirely.

Groups such as Nueva Generacion, based in Guadalajara, and the Matazetas (the “Zeta Killers,” who are purportedly an offshoot of the aforementioned Jalisco organization now based largely in Veracruz) have appeared on the scene in the last two or three years, attracting attention with beheadings, other violent killings and *narcomantas* (banners) laying claim to their turf. Yet a closer examination reveals that these may not actually be new organizations at all: the Nueva Generacion was a name commonly thrown around Guadalajara in association with Sinaloa Federation kingpin Coronel Villareal as early as 2008, while the name Matazetas appeared as early as 2004 in the northern border city of Nuevo Laredo when Sinaloa Federation operatives challenged Los Zetas for their turf.²⁵ It

24 “El Azul, segundo en la lista de criminals mas buscados por la FBI,” *La Jornada*, February 13, 2005.

25 Personal interviews, various sources, Guadalajara, Mexico, 2008; Silvia Otero, “‘El Chapo’ envia a rivales mensaje en video via internet,” *El Universal*, October 15, 2006.

is nearly impossible to confirm whether the new organizations are offshoots of the major cartels or not. Although many disgruntled operatives are often tempted to try to form their own organizations, sometimes even with their leadership's blessing, it is rarely clear whether they operate independently or under an umbrella.

Conclusion

If there is one certainty that has emerged from roughly six years of fighting the cartels in Mexico, it is that the country's drug trafficking organizations are more fragmented than ever, and now lack the leadership of organized, business-oriented kingpins.

There are several scenarios for the future. If offshoots like La Generacion Nueva, Los Zetas and the Matazetas—which have shown a propensity for wanton violence that is unparalleled in Mexican history—continue to gain a foothold, Mexico may become such difficult terrain through which to move drugs that the traffickers shift back to the Caribbean, which they abandoned in the 1990s after increased U.S. law enforcement pressure around the islands. Traffickers also may opt to use Central America as a hub, given its lack of strong institutions.

There is also the possibility that the Sinaloa Federation and Gulf Cartel will seek to consolidate control over the various offshoots and incorporate them into their larger organizations. If this happens, violence would likely diminish, but drug trafficking would flourish, and both U.S. and Mexican law enforcement along the border would be put under increasing pressure.

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Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

July 1, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber detonated explosives inside a Shi'a mosque in Muqdadiya, Diyala Province, killing at least 22 people. – *Telegraph, July 2*

July 2, 2013 (CANADA): Canadian police announced that they foiled an al-Qa`ida-inspired plot to detonate three pressure cooker bombs in Victoria during the Canada Day holiday on July 1. Police said that there was no evidence of a foreign link to the plot. – *Reuters, July 2*

July 2, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan Taliban militants attacked the entrance to a NATO supply company compound in Kabul, killing nine people. Four Nepalese, one Briton and one Romanian were among the dead. – *AFP, July 2; Reuters, July 2*

July 3, 2013 (EUROPE): Charles Farr, the director general of Britain's Office for Security and Counterterrorism, warned that "the blunt truth is there are more people associated with AQ [al-Qa`ida] and AQ-associated organizations now operating in Syria than there ever have been before that close to Europe...Groups in Syria aspire to attack Europe and clearly in this chaotic environment have both the capability and the means to do so using, amongst others, returning foreign fighters who are coming back to Europe." – *Reuters, July 3*

July 4, 2013 (MALI): French forces discovered the body of Philippe Verdon, a French hostage who had been held in Mali by al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb. After an autopsy, French authorities said that Verdon died from a gunshot wound to the back of the head. Verdon, a 53-year-old businessman, was kidnapped from a hotel in northeastern Mali in November 2011. – *RFI, July 19*

July 5, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber wearing an Afghan police uniform detonated his explosives in a police dining room in Trinkot, Uruzgan Province, killing 12 police in what was possibly an insider attack. – *Reuters, July 5*

July 6, 2013 (NIGERIA): Suspected Boko Haram group militants attacked a boarding school in the northeast Nigerian town of Potiskum, Yobe State, killing 29 students and a teacher. Later reports

placed the number of dead at 42. The militants reportedly doused the dormitory in fuel and then set the building on fire as students slept. A number of students were also shot. Boko Haram's leader, Abubakar Shekau, later said that Boko Haram was not responsible for the operation, but that he fully supported the attack "on this Western education school." Shekau said, "We don't attack students." – *AP, July 6; AFP, July 13*

July 7, 2013 (UNITED KINGDOM): The United Kingdom deported radical Muslim preacher Abu Qatada to Jordan to face terrorism charges. UK authorities have tried to deport Qatada, who has been described as a key al-Qa`ida operative in Europe, since 2001, but British courts blocked his extradition over human rights concerns. – *AP, July 7*

July 8, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber on a motorcycle attacked a pro-government tribal elder's vehicle in Hangu District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, killing at least eight people. The elder was not in the vehicle at the time of the attack. – *AP, July 8*

July 8, 2013 (NIGERIA): The United Kingdom announced that they have banned the Boko Haram group under their antiterrorism laws, making it a criminal offense in the United Kingdom to belong to or support the group, as well as to facilitate meetings or wear any clothing supporting them. – *AFP, July 8; Voice of America, July 8*

July 10, 2013 (UNITED KINGDOM): According to the United Kingdom's annual report of the parliamentary intelligence and security committee, "al-Qaida elements and individual jihadists in Syria currently represent the most worrying emerging terrorist threat to the UK and the West...There is a risk of extremist elements in Syria taking advantage of the permissive environment to develop external attack plans, including against Western targets. Large numbers of radicalized individuals have been attracted to the country, including significant numbers from the UK and Europe." The report warned that these militants are likely to acquire "expertise and experience which could significantly increase the threat posed when they return home." – *Guardian, July 10*

July 10, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber targeted a vehicle carrying Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari's security chief in Karachi, killing him and two police officers. – *AP, July 10; Reuters, July 10*

July 11, 2013 (SYRIA): According to the Free Syrian Army (FSA), al-Qa`ida-linked militants from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) killed a senior figure in the FSA. An FSA spokesman said that militants from the al-Qa`ida-linked group called him and threatened that “they will kill all of the Supreme Military Council.” – *Reuters, July 11*

July 12, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber targeted a café in Kirkuk, killing at least 18 people. – *AFP, July 12*

July 13, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber detonated an explosives-laden vehicle at a Shi`a funeral tent in the village of Zahra, north of Baghdad, killing five mourners. – *AFP, July 13*

July 13, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber detonated explosives near a Sunni mosque in southern Baghdad, killing at least 16 people. – *Reuters, July 13*

July 14, 2013 (MAURITANIA): A Mauritanian court freed a Canadian, Aaron Yoon, who was jailed for attempting to join an al-Qa`ida training camp in Mali. Yoon was arrested in December 2011 when he tried to visit al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb camps in neighboring Mali. He was released after his sentence was reduced in an appeal, since he already had served a year and a half in prison. Yoon is of Korean descent. – *AFP, July 14*

July 16, 2013 (PAKISTAN/SYRIA): Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants rejected claims that they were sending fighters to Syria, saying that some TTP militants have traveled to fight in Syria independently but the TTP's focus remained on Pakistan. Various other media reports, however, quoted TTP commanders saying that the group sent “hundreds of fighters” to Syria at the request of their “Arab friends.” – *AFP, July 16; NBC News, July 15*

July 17, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan Taliban militants killed Ahmad Wali Tahiri, a government prosecutor and brother of Afghanistan's national security adviser. – *Washington Post, July 17*

July 17, 2013 (YEMEN): Al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) confirmed that its second-in-command, Said al-Shihri, was “killed in a U.S. drone attack.” According to CNN, AQAP's recent statement “did not say when or where al-Shihri died, just that a U.S. drone took his life sometime after the first week of April.” – *Reuters, July 17; CNN, July 17*

July 17, 2013 (SYRIA): Kurdish fighters reportedly expelled jihadists from the al-Qa`ida-linked Jabhat al-Nusra from the Syrian flashpoint town of Ras al-Ain and took control of the nearby border crossing with Turkey. – *Daily Star, July 17; Voice of America, July 18*

July 17, 2013 (LEBANON): Gunmen shot to death a prominent Syrian pro-government figure at his home in Sarafand in southern Lebanon. Mohammed Darrar Jammo was shot nearly 30 times. According to the Associated Press, “Jammo, a 44-year-old political analyst who often appeared on Arab TV stations, was one of Assad's most vociferous defenders.” – *AP, July 17*

July 18, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): Suspected Taliban militants shot to death eight Afghan civilians who were on their way to jobs at the Camp Shank U.S. military base in Logar Province. – *AFP, July 17*

July 19, 2013 (UNITED STATES): Federal law enforcement officials in Manhattan announced charges against Mokhtar Belmokhtar, including conspiring to support al-Qa`ida among other charges. Belmokhtar, who was once part of al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb, allegedly organized the January 16, 2013, attack on the Ain Amenas gas facility in eastern Algeria in which more than 35 hostages were killed. – *AP, July 19*

July 19, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber killed 20 people inside a Sunni mosque in the town of al-Wajhiyya in Diyala Province. – *France24, July 19; BBC, July 19*

July 19, 2013 (LEBANON): Lebanon charged six alleged members of Jabhat al-Nusra with forming an armed gang with the purpose of conducting terrorist acts in Lebanon. – *Daily Star, July 19*

July 21, 2013 (IRAQ): Al-Qa`ida militants launched a major attack against Abu Ghurayb prison on the outskirts of

Baghdad, freeing hundreds of convicts, including senior members of al-Qa`ida. As part of the assault, suicide bombers in explosives-laden vehicles attacked the gates of the prison, blasting their way into the facility. Gunmen then attacked guards with mortars and rocket-propelled grenades. Militants entered the prison to free inmates, while another group of militants established positions near the main road to fight off government reinforcements sent from Baghdad. Four militants and 10 policemen were killed, while at least 500 inmates escaped. According to one Iraqi official, most of the 500 were “convicted senior members of al-Qa`ida and had received death sentences.” A simultaneous attack on a prison in Taji, 12 miles north of Baghdad, followed a similar design, but militants there failed to free any inmates. During the Taji raid, 16 soldiers and six militants were killed. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant claimed responsibility for both operations. – *Reuters, July 22; UPI, July 22; Reuters, July 23*

July 22, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in a vehicle attacked an Iraqi army convoy in Mosul, Ninawa Province, killing nine soldiers and three civilians. – *AP, July 23*

July 23, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber riding a donkey killed three U.S. soldiers and their Afghan translator in Wardak Province. – *NBC News, July 23*

July 24, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): The Afghan Taliban poisoned and captured at least 12 policemen in Zabul Province. – *AFP, July 25*

July 24, 2013 (PAKISTAN): Four militants, at least one of whom was a suicide bomber, attacked the regional headquarters of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence in Sukkur, Sindh Province, killing three security force personnel and five other people. Both Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan and Jundullah took credit for the operation. – *The News International, July 24; BBC, July 24; New York Times, July 25*

July 25, 2013 (IRAQ): Dozens of Sunni militants set up a roadblock on a highway north of Baghdad. The militants stopped trucks, checked IDs, and then proceeded to execute 14 Shi`a drivers. – *AAP, July 25*

July 25, 2013 (TUNISIA): Mohamed Brahmī, a politician with the opposition secular Popular Front party, was assassinated in Tunis. Authorities found that the gun used to kill Brahmī was the same one used to assassinate another opposition politician, Chokri Belaid, in February 2013. While protestors accused the Islamist-led coalition government of involvement in the killings, the Tunisian government said that the assassinations were carried out by a radical group of Salafists led by Boubacar Hakim, an extremist Salafist and suspected arms smuggler. – *Voice of America, July 26; AP, July 25*

July 26, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber on a motorcycle killed a local police commander, three police officers and three civilians at a bazaar in Ghazni Province. – *Geo TV, July 27*

July 26, 2013 (PAKISTAN): Two suicide bombers on motorcycles detonated explosives at a busy marketplace in Parachinar, a primarily Shi'a area located in Kurram Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The explosions killed at least 52 people. A previously unknown group claimed responsibility, saying that they would execute "similar attacks against the Shi'ite community in Pakistan to seek revenge for the brutalities of Shi'ites against Sunni Muslims in Syria and Iraq." – *Reuters, July 27*

July 27, 2013 (YEMEN): A suspected U.S. drone strike killed four suspected Ansar al-Shari'a militants in Abyan Province. Ansar al-Shari'a is linked to al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula. – *Guardian, July 28; Reuters, July 28*

July 27, 2013 (SOMALIA): A minivan packed with explosives blew up a few meters from a building housing Turkish Embassy staff in Mogadishu, killing two Somali security guards and a university student. Al-Shabab claimed responsibility, saying that "the Turkish were our main target." – *CNN, July 28; BBC, July 27*

July 28, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in a vehicle killed eight Kurdish policemen in Tuz Khurmatu, Salah al-Din Province. – *AFP, July 28*

July 28, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A suspected U.S. drone strike killed five people in the Shawal area of North Waziristan Agency in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, close to the border with Afghanistan. – *Guardian, July 28*

July 29, 2013 (IRAQ): The Associated Press reported that "more than a dozen explosions, mainly from car bombs, ripped through marketplaces, parking lots, a café and rush-hour crowds in Iraq...killing at least 58 people." – *AP, July 29*

July 30, 2013 (PAKISTAN): More than 100 Pakistani Taliban militants disguised as police used bombs to free 250 prisoners from a jail in Dera Ismail Khan. According to Reuters, "As the attack unfolded, gunmen blew up electricity lines to the prison and detonated bombs to breach the outer walls. They fought their way inside using rocket-propelled grenades and machine guns, and called the names of Taliban prisoners they wanted to release through loud speakers." Pakistani officials said that 12 people were killed, including five policemen and four prisoners. The killed prisoners were Shi'a, and the gunmen had slashed open their throats. – *Reuters, July 30; AP, July 31*

July 30, 2013 (SYRIA): A car bomb killed a prominent Syrian Kurdish politician in the northeastern town of Qamishli. The politician, Isa Huso, was a member of the Supreme Kurdish Council. – *BBC, July 30*

July 31, 2013 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new 22-minute audio message saying that the terrorist group would "spare no efforts" to free prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay, as well as other militants held in U.S. prisons. – *AP, July 31*

August 1, 2013 (IRAQ): The United Nations reported that more than 1,000 people were killed in Iraq during the month of July, the highest monthly death toll in five years. – *AP, August 1*

August 2, 2013 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new audio message condemning the removal of Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi from power. Al-Zawahiri, however, also criticized Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood for trying to "satisfy America and the secularists" by abandoning "jihad." He also said Morsi's ouster provides "the

greatest evidence that taking democracy as a path to Islamic rule has failed," and that "legitimacy doesn't lie in elections and democracy but it lies in Shari'a." – *AP, August 3; Reuters, August 2*

August 2, 2013 (GLOBAL): The U.S. State Department issued a worldwide travel alert warning citizens of potential al-Qa`ida terrorist attacks in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia. As a precaution, the U.S. government said it would close 21 embassies and consulates in those regions over the coming weekend. U.S. law enforcement sources later told multiple media outlets that an intercepted electronic communication in which Ayman al-Zawahiri and Nasir al-Wahayshi agreed that they "wanted to do something big" on the weekend of August 3-4 is what led to the precautionary closing of diplomatic posts. – *Bloomberg, August 3; NBC, August 5*

August 2, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): Hundreds of Taliban fighters ambushed a police and military convoy in Nangarhar Province, sparking a five-hour battle. More than 20 Afghan policemen and dozens of Taliban fighters were killed. – *Dawn, August 3*

August 2, 2013 (SYRIA): Clashes between Kurdish fighters and al-Qa`ida-linked militants in Hasaka Province in northern Syria killed 12 members of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Approximately 22 Kurdish fighters died as well. – *Daily Star, August 2*

August 3, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): Three suicide attackers tried to target the Indian Consulate in Jalalabad, Nangarhar Province, resulting in nine civilian deaths. All three militants were also killed. The Afghan Taliban denied responsibility. – *Independent, August 3*

August 5, 2013 (THAILAND): Unidentified gunmen assassinated Imam Yacob Raimani, a high-profile Muslim cleric, in Pattani Province. Some reportedly viewed him as a sympathizer of Thai authorities. Since 2004, more than 5,000 people have been killed in the insurgency in southern Thailand. – *Wall Street Journal, August 6*

August 6, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban leader Mullah Omar released his annual statement, saying that the country's presidential elections

scheduled for April 2014 are a “deceiving drama.” He also said that the Taliban were willing to begin peace negotiations. – *Guardian, August 6*

August 7, 2013 (YEMEN): Two suspected U.S. drone strikes killed six militants in Shabwa Province. – *UPI, April 7*

August 7, 2013 (YEMEN): Yemeni authorities said that they uncovered an al-Qa`ida plot to fire missiles at foreign embassies in Sana`a and to attack naval forces protecting international shipping in the Red Sea. – *Globe and Mail, August 7; UPI, August 7*

August 8, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber killed at least 29 people at a funeral for a policeman in Quetta, Baluchistan Province. Fayaz Sumbal, the deputy inspector general for police operations in Quetta, was among the dead. – *NBC, August 8; Reuters, August 8*

August 8, 2013 (YEMEN): A suspected U.S. drone strike killed six alleged militants from al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula in Marib Province. – *CBS, August 8*

August 8, 2013 (THAILAND): The Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), a Muslim-Malay separatist group in southern Thailand, suspended peace talks with the Thai government. Peace talks to resolve southern Thailand’s insurgency began in February 2013. – *Straits Times, August 8; AP, August 8*

August 10, 2013 (IRAQ): The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), al-Qa`ida’s Iraqi affiliate, executed a series of attacks on cafes and busy marketplaces, killing 69 people. Approximately nine car bombs exploded in Shi`a neighborhoods in Baghdad, among other attacks. The ISIL said that the attacks were in revenge for the arrests of hundreds of Muslims by Iraqi security forces. – *AP, August 12; UPI, August 11*

August 10, 2013 (YEMEN): A suspected U.S. drone strike killed two alleged al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) militants in Lahj Province. Later reports suggested that AQAP’s chief bombmaker, Ibrahim al-Asiri, may have been wounded in the strike. – *AP, August 11; NBC, August 13*

August 12, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber killed 13 people in a café in the Shi`a-majority town of Balad, Salah al-Din Province. – *AP, August 12*

August 12, 2013 (YEMEN): Nasir al-Wahayshi, the leader of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), said that he would soon free jailed Islamist militants. AQAP staged at least two prison breaks last month, and al-Wahayshi himself escaped from a prison in Yemen in 2006. – *Reuters, August 12*

August 13, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban fighters kidnapped female parliamentarian Fariba Ahmadi Kakar in Ghazni Province. In exchange for her freedom, the militants demanded that four Taliban prisoners be released. – *Reuters, August 13*

August 13, 2013 (NIGERIA): Nigerian security forces said that they killed two senior leaders in the Boko Haram group, Abubakar Zakaria Ya`u and Muhammed Bama. – *Voice of America, August 15*

August 14, 2013 (IRAQ): A pair of bombings killed 14 people in Ba`quba, Diyala Province. – *Voice of America, August 15*

August 14, 2013 (SYRIA): Al-Qa`ida’s Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) reportedly expelled other rebel fighters—belonging to the Ahfad al-Rasoul brigade—from the northern city of Raqa. – *AFP, August 14*

August 15, 2013 (LEBANON): A car bomb ripped through the southern Beirut stronghold of Hizb Allah, killing 24 people. Hizb Allah chief Hassan Nasrallah accused radical Sunni Islamists of being behind the attack, and then he promised to escalate his group’s military support to Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad. – *Reuters, August 16*

August 16, 2013 (THAILAND): Suspected Muslim-Malay militants killed four police officers in front of a nursery school in Narathiwat Province in southern Thailand. – *AFP, August 16*

August 18, 2013 (GLOBAL): American al-Qa`ida militant Adam Gadahn released a new video message, calling for more attacks on Western diplomats in the Arab world. He also praised the men who killed the U.S. ambassador to Libya in 2012.

Gadahn is a California-born convert to Islam who has a \$1 million U.S. bounty on his head. – *Reuters, August 18*

August 19, 2013 (EUROPE): The German newspaper *Bild* reported that al-Qa`ida is plotting attacks on Europe’s high speed rail network. The newspaper, citing intelligence sources, said that al-Qa`ida could plant explosives on trains and tunnels or sabotage train tracks and electric cabling. – *AFP, August 19*

August 19, 2013 (NIGERIA): The Nigerian military said that the leader of the Boko Haram group, Abubakar Shekau, may have died from gunshot wounds sustained during a clash on June 30. Past reports of Shekau’s death, however, have proved false. – *Reuters, August 19*

August 19, 2013 (NIGERIA): Suspected Boko Haram group gunmen killed at least 35 people in the village of Demba in Borno State after locals refused to cooperate with them. – *BBC, August 23*

August 22, 2013 (NORTH AFRICA): Two Islamist groups that broke from al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb announced that they have merged, and they pledged to attack French interests. The decision unites fighters led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar with the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). Both groups fought in Mali until the French-led invasion earlier this year. The new name for the group was identified as al-Mourabitoun. – *Reuters, August 22*

August 22, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle attacked an Iraqi military headquarters in Ramadi, Anbar Province, killing at least 14 people. – *Voice of America, August 22*

August 22, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A senior commander of the Punjabi Taliban, Ismatullah Muaweea, welcomed the Pakistani government’s recent offer to hold peace talks. Two days later, on August 24, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) dismissed Muaweea from his position as head of the Punjab chapter. – *AFP/Dawn, August 22; AFP, August 24*

August 22, 2013 (PAKISTAN): Militant commander Ghulam Jan Wazir, who was known for sheltering al-Qa`ida fighters, was killed by a roadside bomb three miles west of Wana in South Waziristan Agency

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of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. According to Agence France-Presse, "He is the third pro al-Qaeda militant commander killed in similar circumstances in South Waziristan in the last two years." – *AFP, August 22*

August 23, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber killed at least 28 people in a crowded park in the predominately Shi'a al-Qahira neighborhood in northeastern Baghdad. – *CNN, August 23*

August 23, 2013 (LEBANON): Two car bombs exploded in Tripoli, killing at least 42 people. According to Voice of America, "One of the bombs exploded outside the Taqwa mosque as midday prayers were ending. That mosque is where Sheik Salem Rafei, a Salafi cleric opposed to Lebanon's militant Shi'ite Hezbollah group, usually prays." The Tripoli bombings come a week after a car bomb killed 24 people in Hizb Allah's southern Beirut stronghold on August 15, an attack that was blamed on Salafists. – *Voice of America, August 23*

August 23, 2013 (SYRIA): A suicide bomber killed eight people at a restaurant in Aleppo. – *Bloomberg, August 23*

August 23, 2013 (YEMEN): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle killed two soldiers at a checkpoint in Hadramawt Province. Yemeni authorities blamed al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula. – *AFP, August 23*

August 25, 2013 (SYRIA): A car bomb killed Anas Abdul-Razzaq Na'em, the governor of Hama Province. – *al-Jazeera, August 25*

August 25, 2013 (SYRIA): The al-Qa`ida-linked Jabhat al-Nusra rebel group vowed revenge attacks against Alawite villages in response to claims that Syrian regime forces used chemical weapons against civilians near Damascus. Al-Qa`ida's Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) released its own statement promising a "volcano of revenge" against Syrian government security and military targets. – *AFP, August 25; Reuters, August 28*

August 25, 2013 (YEMEN): A bomb tore through a bus carrying Yemeni air force personnel to their base in Sana'a, killing between one and six officers. – *Reuters, August 25*

August 27, 2013 (TUNISIA): The Tunisian government declared Ansar al-Shari`a, the country's most prominent organization of Salafists, as a terrorist group. – *AP, August 28*

August 28, 2013 (IRAQ): A series of bombings and other attacks across Baghdad killed at least 71 people. On August 30, al-Qa`ida's Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant claimed responsibility for the attacks. – *Reuters, August 28; AFP, August 30*

August 28, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): The Taliban attacked a base operated by Polish and Afghan forces in Ghazni Province, killing four policemen and three civilians. – *Reuters, August 29*

August 29, 2013 (BAHRAIN): A car bomb exploded as a police patrol passed by in a Shi'a village near Manama, injuring four Bahraini policemen. According to Agence France-Presse, "Bahrain has been rocked by sporadic violence since pro-democracy protests started by its Shiites in 2011." – *AFP, August 30*

August 29, 2013 (IRAQ): A car bomb killed at least 16 people at a market in Samarra, Salah al-Din Province. – *BBC, August 29*

August 30, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber killed a district governor at a mosque in Kunduz Province. – *RFE/RL, August 30*

August 31, 2013 (EGYPT): Al-Qa`ida's Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) called on Egyptians to take up arms against their army, criticizing the Egyptian military's crackdown on Islamist protestors. The group also said that the Muslim Brotherhood is "more evil and malevolent than the secularists, and if seizing power necessitates bowing to the Devil, they will bow without hesitation." – *Reuters, August 31; AP, August 31*

August 31, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber killed six people in front of a bank in Kandahar. – *CNN, August 31*

August 31, 2013 (IRAQ): A car bomb killed 12 people in Ramadi, Anbar Province. – *Reuters, September 1*