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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 Risks Posed by Jihadist Hackers

By Christopher Heffelfinger

THE CURRENT POOL of jihadist hackers (or jihadist hacktivists[1]) is youthful, ambitious in its goals, and largely lagging in terms of its technical capabilities. This is best illustrated by the fact that these hackers have carried out few effective large-scale attacks to date. Jihadist hacktivists remain a loosely to disorganized set of individual hackers who form and disband hacking groups they create, and frequently enter into counterproductive rivalries with fellow hackers. Perhaps as a result, despite more than seven years of efforts to construct and recruit for jihadist hacking attacks via online forums,[2] they have yet to form a jihadist hacking group that can demonstrably perform effective cyber attacks.

There are a range of skillsets, leadership abilities and ideologies among jihadist-inspired hacktivists, and some individual hackers have carried out small- to medium-scale cyber attacks against U.S. government and private sector targets, with moderate impact in terms of data loss and exposure. Those attacks also provided jihadist hacktivists with clout and a media platform (often predominately social

1 A hacktivist is a hacker who performs cyber attacks for a movement or cause. The U.S. Computer Emergency Response Team (US-CERT) includes in their definition of hacktivist: "Hacktivists form a small, foreign population of politically active hackers that includes individuals and groups with anti-U.S. motives," although the term does not explicitly connote an anti-American agenda. For the US-CERT definition, see "Cyber Threat Source Descriptions," U.S. Department of Homeland Security, May 2005.

2 Calls for jihadist hacking units and electronic mujahidin armies have been circulating in al-Qa` ida magazines since late 2005.

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media) from which to promote their message. The range of ideological beliefs among jihadist-inspired hackers is varied; some hacking groups embrace hard line militant Islamist imagery and messaging (such as that of al-Qa`ida), while concurrently incorporating the imagery, ethos and slogans of secular hacking collectives such as Anonymous into the informational aspects of their cyber attack campaigns.

This article evaluates existing jihadist cyber attack capabilities, offers a case study on a leading pro-jihadist hacktivist, and examines the rise in interest in cyber attacks among proponents of jihadist activism generally. It finds that although cyber attacks are becoming a more common and desirable means of furthering the global jihadist agenda, the overall impact and sophistication of jihadist hacktivists' attacks have been relatively low and will likely remain as such in the near term.

Evaluating Existing Jihadist Cyber Attack Capabilities

In comparison to hackers and hacking groups sponsored or controlled by state actors, jihadist hacktivists are clearly behind in terms of the impact of their attacks, their diminished technical skillset, and their overall weak organizational and recruitment abilities. Their hacking activities frequently include website defacements (usually against poorly secured websites), wherein the attackers leave antagonistic imagery and comments on the victimized websites.[3] Yet the activities of some jihadist hacktivists indicate there is a gradual sophistication of attack modes and intended attack impacts, occurring alongside a growing contingent of young jihadist enthusiasts who see cyber attacks as an increasingly effective and relatively easy way to contribute to the liberation or support of "oppressed" Muslims around the globe, which can frequently fall under the designation of "cyber terrorism."[4]

While jihadist-themed cyber attacks have been modest and often rudimentary over the past decade, the advancement and ambitions of certain jihadist hacking groups, individual hacktivists and proponents of cyber jihad over the past one to two years give some cause for concern in this area, particularly as those adversaries are growing more adept at identifying vulnerabilities in U.S. and other government targets, as well as those in the private sector. Clearly, the damage caused by jihadist cyber attacks pales in comparison to those under state sponsorship (prominent cases of the latter include Stuxnet in Iran, the highly destructive Saudi Aramco malware attack, operations conducted by the Syrian Electronic Army, and various data breaches performed by the Chinese People's Liberation Army Unit 61398, among others). Jihadist cyber attacks also trail those of better known hacktivist groups such as Anonymous or LulzSec, both in terms of the volume of attacks, sophistication, and impact. Yet the prospect of jihadists conducting a high impact cyber attack—such as one against an industrial control system (ICS) target or a series of high profile financial attacks—should not be dismissed.

Junaid Hussain (aka TriCk): Pro-Jihadist Hacktivist, Cyber Criminal

One prominent jihadist-inspired hacktivist was Junaid Hussain. Born in 1994, Hussain founded the hacking group TeaMpOisoN. Between the ages of 13-17, Hussain was a highly active hacker using the online moniker "TriCk." Between 2010 and 2012, he targeted NATO, officials and agencies of the UK government and a United States emergency response call line, among others, carrying out cyber attacks that were typically loosely jihadist-themed and promoting the liberation of Muslims in Palestine, Kashmir and other Muslim-majority conflict zones. Hussain's attacks also included the publication of personally identifiable information on the leadership of the English Defense League (EDL), an "anti-Islamist extremism" group, in April 2011, and the theft of hundreds of Israeli credit card holders' data as part of "Operation Free Palestine" in November 2011.[5] He stated that he became political when he was 15-years-old, after "watching videos of children getting killed in countries like Kashmir and Palestine."[6] He described his actions on behalf of TeaMpOisoN as "internet guerrilla warfare."[7]

Hussain was sentenced on July 27, 2012, to six months imprisonment after he pleaded guilty in a London court to conspiring to commit a public nuisance between January 1, 2010, and April 14, 2012, and "causing a computer to perform a function to secure unauthorized access to a program or data" under the UK Computer Misuse Act.[8] A resident of Birmingham, England, Hussain had turned 18 shortly before the trial date in late June 2012.[9] His initial arrest—after years of maintaining his anonymity as a teenage hacker—was prompted by a phone-based hack and concurrent telephonic denial-of-service (DoS) attack targeting the Anti-Terrorist Hotline of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) on April 10-11, 2012.[10]

"Although cyber attacks are becoming a more common and desirable means of furthering the global jihadist agenda, the overall impact and sophistication of jihadist hacktivists' attacks have been relatively low and will likely remain as such in the near term."

3 Such imagery typically includes the attacking group's logo and/or a satire of the victim's logo, or statements criticizing the victim's security.

4 There is often a thin line between cyberterrorism and online activism for humanitarian or social causes. As with kinetic activities, however, terrorism is distinguished by causing harm to another person or their property in the act of conveying a message, or political agenda.

5 Hannah Furness, "Team Poison: Profile of the Hackers," *Telegraph*, April 12, 2012.

6 Eduard Kovacs, "Hackers Around the World: It's No TriCk, He's Among the Best in the UK," Softpedia, February 18, 2012.

7 Ibid.

8 Caroline Grant, "Hacker's Facing Jail Over Blair Email Raid," *The Sun*, June 30, 2012.

9 Tammy Hughes, "'Team Poison' Hacker, 18, who Published Tony Blair's Address Book Online Faces Jail," *Daily Mail*, June 30, 2012.

10 On the evening of April 12, 2012, TriCk and another teenager aged 16 (who was later released on bail after police said they did not believe him to be a member of TeaMpOisoN) were arrested by police at a residence in Birmingham, in West Midlands. See "Two Arrested After Hackers Attacked Anti-Terror Hotline," *Telegraph*,

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Following Hussain's arrest, his previous hacking activities carried out under the name TriCk and his group, TeaMpOisoN, were handled by the Police Central eCrime Unit, which investigates major cyber crimes.[11] This was due in part to the fact that Hussain had, in June 2011, breached the personal e-mail account of Katy Kay, a former special adviser to Prime Minister Tony Blair, and stole home addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses of Tony Blair, his wife and sister-in-law, as well as the personal information of other relatives, friends, and contacts in the House of Lords and Parliament.[12]

Shortly after the telephonic DoS attack on April 11, 2012, ended, Hussain posted a four-minute audio recording on YouTube entitled "Mi6: Counter Terrorism Command Phones Hacked - Leaked Call Discussing TeaMpOisoN," that contained an intercepted conversation among counterterrorism staff discussing the automated call "hoax."[13] During that recording, one employee of the counterterrorism office is heard telling a colleague that the anti-terrorism hotline had been inundated with "about 700 calls" from TeaMpOisoN over the previous two nights.[14] The employees also acknowledged that legitimate callers had been effectively denied access to the anti-terrorism hotline that TriCk and TeaMpOisoN had targeted.[15]

The phone-based attacks, which resulted in the breach and subsequent publication of sensitive conversations among British counterterrorism employees over the victimized phone lines, used a somewhat novel hacking technique that had been popular among the earliest generation of hackers in the 1980s known as "phreaking."[16] While Hussain did not disclose any further specifics about the method he and other TeaMpOisoN members claimed to use to record the phone call, he said "the conversation was tapped into via a private phreaking method, their phone system is old and we found a way to get in via basic but private phreaking technique."[17] As claimed, this hacking method likely enabled the hackers to eavesdrop on and record the conversations of officers in London's MPS.

The targeting of the hotline, Hussain said in an interview on April 11, 2012, occurred in retaliation to the fact that "the UK court system has extradited Babar Ahmad, Adel Abdel Bary and a few others" to face unfair treatment in the United States.[18] Babar Ahmad was allegedly involved in promoting militant jihadist materials online through a prominent website called "Azzam Publications."[19] Another of the five men to be extradited was a well-known radical cleric named Abu Hamza al-Masri who had established links to known militant groups including al-Qa`ida.[20]

Implications of TeaMp0isoN's Phone Hacking

TeaMpOisoN attempted a similar telephonic DoS attack on the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, but it failed, possibly due to the fact that it relied on a participatory model that required individual volunteers to work, and it ultimately lacked adequate numbers of supporters for the DoS attack to have any substantial impact.[21] In the successful telephonic DoS attack on the MPS Anti-Terrorist Hotline in April 2012, however, the calls were made by an automated caller program (which continuously repeated the phrase "Team Poison" in a computer-generated voice), using a compromised server based in Malaysia[22] running Asterisk software.[23] That attack also demonstrated an ability to learn from past mistakes and deliver an improved attack mechanism within a short-time frame on the part of TriCk and supporting TeaMpOisoN members.

In addition to affecting the MPS' anti-terrorism hotline over a two-day period, another significant aspect of the operation from a capabilities perspective is that Hussain was able to eavesdrop on sensitive, confidential phone conversations among counterterrorism and law enforcement officials. That capability was illustrated by the leaked recordings on YouTube and further evinced when MPS officials acknowledged it in the media—with the implication being that other hacktivists, including those directly supporting militant groups such as al-Qa`ida, could use it for counterintelligence purposes.[24] While such a capability may pose a risk to the security of law enforcement and other government agencies' communications if used effectively by adversaries, gaining highly-sensitive data from this tactic is challenging and uncommon, making it unlikely to be employed in a widespread fashion.[25]

Similar Groups and Offshoots

Around TeaMpOisoN emerged a number of like-minded hacking groups (in addition to several others that formed organically, unrelated to TriCk or TeaMpOisoN) that have carried out similar jihadist-oriented cyber attack campaigns. These groups are often composed of a majority of young Sunni Muslims with membership and support from non-Muslims in various countries.[26] ZCompany Hacking Crew (ZHC), which began in June 2010 as a spin-off hacking collective from TeaMpOisoN, aims to "end injustice, extremism, Zionism, illegal occupation" and other "evils," with a primary focus on Kashmir and Palestine.[27] In a December 2011 manifesto, it called for

April 12, 2012.

11 Hughes.

12 "'Team Poison' Hacker Who Posted Tony Blair's Details is Jailed," *Telegraph*, July 27, 2012.

13 Martin Evans, Christopher Williams and Hannah Furness, "Two Arrested after Hackers Attacked Anti-Terror Hotline," *Telegraph*, April 12, 2012.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Phreaking is the act of hacking into or manipulating a telephone network. Popularized in the 1980s, it is often considered the precursor to computer hacking.

17 "Hackers 'Eavesdrop on Terror Line,'" *Guardian*, April 11, 2012.

18 Evans et al.

19 "Babar Ahmad and Abu Hamza Among Terror Suspects to be Sent to US," BBC, October 5, 2012.

20 Ibid.

21 Message posted by TeaMpOisoN members announcing "Op911" on September 7, 2011, on pastebin.com, a site commonly used by hacktivists to post campaign messages.

22 Paul Roberts, "UK Teen, TeaMpOisoN Member, Arrested For 'Phone Bomb' Attack," ThreatPost.com, April 17, 2012; "Hackers 'Eavesdrop on Terror Line.'"

23 Asterisk software is an open source software product that enables users to convert a Linux-run server into a VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) telephone exchange.

24 Evans et al.

25 Jeremy Kirk, "How Anonymous Hacked the FBI-SOCA Conference Call," IDG News Service, March 6, 2012.

26 As observed from group membership and participation in social media during 2011-2012.

27 These details are from a manifesto posted by ZHC members on pastebin.com and various social media outlets in December 2011.

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members and supporters to "hack USA websites against Quran burning/draw Muhammad (PBUH) or for protesting against the killings of innocents in IRAQ, AFG and Pakistan" and to "hack France websites for protesting ban on *hijab*."[28] The following month, the group launched a widespread campaign (which was again primarily composed of defacement attacks) against Western targets called "Operation 1M_vs_NATO." On January 9, 2012, it claimed to compromise credit card holders' data from servers located in the United States, United Kingdom and Australia. The attackers released a list of targeted servers on Pastebin,[29] but did not readily disclose the method used in the alleged credit card theft. While it may have been exaggerated or ineffective, their claim nonetheless marked ZHC's first declared foray into causing financial loss as a facet of their attacks.[30]

"These attacks have resulted in low- to medium-level data and privacy loss, but a significant distance remains between jihadist hacktivists' demonstrated abilities and the capability to conduct an effective cyber attack on critical infrastructure."

One curious offshoot from TeaMpOisoN was "PoisAnon," a collaboration between TeaMpOisoN and purported Anonymous members that emerged in late 2011 to carry out shared cyber operations such as "OpCensorThis" and "OpRobinHood." During the week of December 1, 2012, as part of "OpRobinHood," PoisAnon identified and published a purported SQL[31] vulnerability in the First National Bank of Long Island website, then demonstrated the same SQLi (SQL injection) vulnerability on a webpage belonging to the BCD Credit Union in the United Kingdom.[32] A TeaMpOisoN member also claimed to identify a similar vulnerability on the website of the National Bank of California.[33] Yet in these cases, the attackers published statements saying that they would not release innocent peoples' credit card information, instead urging them to withdraw their money from those and other financial institutions.[34] Despite demonstrating a capability, the group members shied away from publishing breached credit card data, perhaps out of caution. More significant than the attacks, however, is the amalgamation of the sometimes jihadist-themed TeaMpOisoN and Anonymous, through a shared ethos of aiding the oppressed and confronting corrupt governments. Given how such a movement could appeal strongly to younger recruits, it could be an early indication of what the next, younger generation of jihadist enthusiasts-cum-hacktivists looks like.

TeaMpOisoN and ZHC have also been affiliated with smaller offshoot hacking groups such as the Mujahideen Hacking Unit (MHU) and Muslim Liberation Army (MLA) that had some overlapping membership with TeaMpOisoN and ZHC. These groups have largely been composed of young Pakistani Muslims espousing a hard line Salafi-jihadi message and functioned more as propaganda units than hacking cells, carrying out low level website defacements and other generally low impact activities.[35] In addition to these groups, individual hacktivists have, at times, had an impact on the security environment.

Jihadist DDoS Attacks Gain Global Attention

On January 16, 2012, a Saudi hacker with the moniker "0xOmar" conducted a high profile distributed denial-of-service (DDoS)[36] attack on the websites of Israeli national airline El Al and the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange.[37] The DDoS attack also targeted the websites of three Israeli banks that same day.[38] The DDoS attacks did not impact trading on the stock exchange, nor did it affect the operations of the airline; only the front-facing websites victimized in the attack were temporarily inaccessible.

0xOmar claimed a group called "Nightmare" assisted him in the attacks, but little information is available to confirm that such a hacking group existed that was in contact with him at the time of the attacks. The DDoS attack tool used by 0xOmar on January 16 was not disclosed. The affected websites were largely restored to normal operations within one business day, but the media impact of the attacks was felt throughout the Middle East and bolstered other pro-jihadist and Islamist-inspired hacking groups.

One prominent Muslim cleric who commented on the media coverage was Kuwaiti imam Dr. Tariq al-Suwaidan, who also hosts a popular television show. One day after 0xOmar's DDoS attacks on Israeli targets, al-Suwaidan posted on his Twitter account, which had some 240,000 followers, a call "to unify the efforts of [Muslim] hackers in the endeavor of electronic jihad against the Zionist enemy."[39] Al-Suwaidan is also a leading member of the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood, and in May 2007 he was listed as an unindicted co-conspirator in the U.S. Department of Justice's case against the Muslim-American charity, the Holy Land Foundation.[40]

28 Ibid.

29 Pastebin.com is a website that allows users to store text for a certain period of time. The website is mainly used by programmers to store pieces of source code, but is open to any user to paste any type of text.

30 The theft of databases of credit card holder information is not uncommon among hacktivists. Many employ programs to scan for vulnerabilities in SQL or XSS to exfiltrate sensitive customer data.

31 Structured Query Language, or SQL, is a programming language designed for managing data in relational databases.

32 "First National Bank of Long Island, Operation Robin Hood Victim," Softpedia, November 29, 2011. The original statement is online at www.pastebin.com/g0Ckrq3u.

33 The claim was made on a TeaMpOisoN member's Twitter page.

34 Ibid.

35 As observed from group membership and participation in social media during 2011-2012.

36 A DDoS attack employs a botnet of compromised or voluntary machines as "bots," which simultaneously send requests to a specified server and, if successful, render it unresponsive.

37 Gianluca Mezzofiore, "'Nightmare' 0xOmar Hackers Attack Israel's Stock Exchange and El Al," *International Business Times*, January 16, 2012.

38 "'I Want to Harm Israel,' Saudi Hacker Tells 'Post,'" *Jerusalem Post*, January 16, 2012.

39 In addition to his actual Twitter post, also see "Kuwaiti Imam: Cyber Jihad Effective," ynetnews.com, January 18, 2012.

40 *U.S.A. v. Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development*, Northern District of Texas, 2007.

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Perhaps unsurprisingly, al-Suwaidan's call to a unified cyber jihad against Israel produced little tangible effect. Similar calls to a unified jihad have been made among real-world Islamist activists for years, yet they have never managed to overcome fragmentation and in-fighting. This is in part because the jihadist hacktivist community, like its kinetic counterpart, is prone to decentralization, which explains why it has been unable to consistently mount high impact cyber attacks, whether through DDoS tools or exploiting code vulnerabilities and performing data breaches.

Conclusion

To date, jihadist hacktivists and hacking collectives sympathetic to jihadist causes have largely used unsophisticated attack methods. These include brute force cracking to hack into e-mail and web servers and other basic techniques such as using open source hacking software that scans for vulnerabilities, or programs that run pre-programmed exploits. Pro-jihadist hackers have also used DDoS attacks (with occasional effectiveness, notably in the case of the Saudi hacker 0xOmar) and limited spear-phishing[41] and other social-engineering-based network intrusion techniques. These attacks have resulted in low- to medium- level data and privacy loss, but a significant distance remains between jihadist hacktivists' demonstrated abilities and the capability to conduct an effective cyber attack on critical infrastructure, or even those with significant financial cost.

A number of "hacking units" or "cyber armies" incorporating al-Qa`ida's name or identifying as aiding militant jihad have emerged (or at least announced their formation) in recent years, yet so far none have managed to gain traction, garner much media attention, or carry out a significant attack. They also appear to lack any skilled membership. While some on jihadist forums have called for attacks on critical infrastructure targets, no specific or viable plots have emerged against them from any jihadist-affiliated actors.[42] Nonetheless, the interest in such high profile, high impact attacks remains among jihadist hacktivists and proponents of Islamist militancy. As the pool of jihadist hacktivists continues to grow, and some advance to more sophisticated attack tools and methods, the possibility of an effective cyber attack emerging from among these actors becomes more likely.

The continuance of vulnerable attack targets and the likely increase in Islamist hacking activity in the near term combine to form a potentially challenging security environment for U.S. and other Western governments and private companies. Many of these potential targets, however, can mitigate the impact of cyber-terrorists—whether they are jihadist hacktivists or hackers from a collective like Anonymous—by taking additional steps to safeguard the integrity of their data and their customers' information, thereby reducing the media attention such attackers seek to exploit in pursuit of their agenda and message campaigns.

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41 "Spear-phishing" is a phishing attack against a specific target, rather than a general population, typically with the aim of gaining access to a secured network.

42 On June 11, 2011, in a leading jihadist forum, "Yaman" posted a highly detailed message calling for a "Center for Electronic Terrorism." A top priority for this center, he described, is the targeting of "SCADA [supervisory control and data acquisition] systems to distort the companies of electricity, gas, water, airports, trains, subway trains and central control systems" in the United States, United Kingdom and France. Yaman claimed the endeavor was a "new center for Qa`idat al-Jihad."

Fire as a Weapon in Terrorist Attacks

By Joseph W. Pfeifer

This article is adapted from the author's testimony on "Protecting the Homeland Against Mumbai-Style Attacks and the Threat from Lashkar-e-Taiba" presented to the U.S. House Committee on Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence on June 12, 2013.

THE USE OF fire for criminal, gang, and terrorist activities, as well as targeting first responders, is not new. During the past four decades, the New York City Fire Department (FDNY) has faced hundreds of intentionally set fires that would often target people. On March 25, 1990, however, the unthinkable happened. An arsonist, with a plastic container of gasoline, spread the fuel on the exit stairs of the "Happy Land Night Club" in the Bronx intentionally killing 87 people, foreshadowing even larger events to come.

The attacks of September 11, 2001, are remembered as the first to employ airplanes as weapons of mass destruction, resulting in the deaths of almost 3,000 people. It was the resultant fires, however, that brought down Towers 1 and 2 of the World Trade Center in the deadliest attack on U.S. soil. Seven years later, in what is described as a "paradigm shift," 10 terrorist operatives from Lashkar-i-Tayyiba (LeT) carried out attacks over three days in Mumbai, India, in November 2008, using a mix of automatic weapons, explosives and fire.[1] Each of these attacks is remembered for something other than fire, yet in each it was the fire that complicated rescue operations and drastically increased the lethality of the attacks.

A full understanding of fire as a weapon and implications for response are essential for homeland security, as it requires new policies and partnerships to address this emerging threat. Fire is an attractive weapon for terrorists for several reasons. Igniting a fire requires little to no training. Fire and associated

1 Michael R. Bloomberg et al., *FDNY Counterterrorism and Risk Management Strategy* (New York: New York City Fire Department, 2011).

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smoke can penetrate defenses with alarming lethality. Fire makes tactical response more difficult. The images of fire also increase media coverage, capturing world attention.[2] The FDNY has been studying this terrorist trend closely and, as a result of those efforts, is leading the national fire service on this issue.

Security personnel and emergency responders must rethink the way that they prepare and respond to incidents and anticipate the use of fire as a weapon, especially when combined with other attack methods. This article examines the terrorist use of fire as a weapon, the complexities of responding to multi-modality attacks involving fire, and the role the FDNY can play in national homeland security efforts.

Understanding Fire as a Weapon

The devastating 2008 attacks in Mumbai, India, represented a game-changer. Over three days, a city of nearly 14 million was held hostage while 166 people were murdered in multiple locations across the city, introducing a new model for terrorist attacks. The nature of the Mumbai attack confused those providing tactical response, rescue operations, fire extinguishment and mass casualty care. The attackers employed multiple means of attack, including: improvised explosive devices, assassination, hostage barricade, building takeover, active shooter, kidnapping and fire. Despite all of the violence, the most iconic images from that event remain the fire at Taj Mahal Hotel. The pictures of people hanging out of the windows of the hotel to escape the fire are reminiscent of 9/11.

Brian Jenkins notably stated in 1974 that "terrorist attacks are often carefully choreographed to attract the attention of the electronic media and the international press…Terrorism is theater." Directing the Mumbai attack from Pakistan, the mastermind asked the terrorists, "Are you setting the fire or not?"[3] He understood that the fire would capture the attention of the television cameras outside the hotel and would create an image the world would watch. In this case, fire was used as a strategic weapon. Yet it also created a condition that complicated the rescue planning and challenged the first responders to deal with not only an active shooter threat inside a hostage barricade situation, but also one where fire and smoke created a second layer of obstacles to the rescue force—one for which they were not prepared.

On September 11, 2012, the first murder of an American ambassador since 1988 took place in Benghazi, Libya. Although firearms, IEDs and military ordinance were used, it was not bullets or explosives that killed the U.S. ambassador, but rather smoke from an arson fire. During the attack on the U.S. mission in Benghazi, which killed four Americans,[4] terrorists reportedly linked to Ansar al-Shari`a and al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) used fuel from jerry cans to start a fire in the main villa, where Ambassador Christopher Stevens was sheltering in the designated location with two members of his diplomatic security detail. As the three men attempted to escape the untenable atmosphere—filled with choking, blinding smoke—the ambassador was separated from the one member of the detail who was able to escape through a window. Unfortunately, Ambassador Stevens and the other agent did not follow. Similar to 9/11 and Mumbai, the world was left with another image of a building ablaze during a terrorist attack. Following this incident, similar arson attacks took place days after Benghazi against the UN Multinational Force in the Sinai Peninsula as well as at the U.S. Embassy in Tunis, Tunisia.

"A full understanding of fire as a weapon and implications for response are essential for homeland security, as it requires new policies and partnerships to address this emerging threat."

While successful attacks are instructive, it is equally important to study unrealized terrorist plots as they reveal a great deal about adversary intentions, motivations, target selection and desired tactics.

- Arriving in the United States from the United Kingdom, al-Qa`ida operative Dhiren Barot carried out reconnaissance for terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C. Part of his research focused on exploiting building vulnerabilities, including gaps in fire protection. He determined that he could cause significant damage to the Prudential Building in Newark, New Jersey, and the Citi Corp Building in New York by ramming a loaded gas tanker truck into the lobby and then igniting the fuel.

- Another al-Qa`ida operative, Brooklyn-born Jose Padilla, determined that a "dirty bomb" attack might be too difficult to execute, so instead he planned to set wildfires, as well as ignite high-rise buildings by damaging the gas lines in apartments.

- An al-Qa`ida cell in the United Kingdom researched means to disable fire suppression systems to increase the impact of a plot that was ultimately disrupted by authorities.

These failed plots point to a strong interest in the use of fire as a weapon by terrorist groups and those they influence. In its widely disseminated English-language *Inspire* magazine, al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has repeatedly urged aspiring homegrown violent extremists to carry out low tech, high impact attacks in the United States or other Western countries. In one issue of *Inspire*, the readers were introduced to various methods of conducting an attack, including the use of simple "ember bombs" to ignite forest fires.[5] Equally important, the images from attacks like Mumbai serve as a model for others to follow.

2 The images of buildings on fire with people trapped at the windows captured the world's attention and provided a dramatic backdrop to the terrorist actions.

3 "Keep Fighting But Don't Be Taken Alive: Handlers to 26/11 Attackers," *Times of India*, July 6, 2012.

4 Ambassador Christopher Stevens and information management officer Sean Smith were killed inside the main villa by smoke and fire. Former Navy SEALs Tyrone Woods and Glen Doherty were killed elsewhere during the attacks.

5 "Inspire Magazine: The 'Vanity Fair' of Terrorism," CBS, May 4, 2012.

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These events reveal that a group does not need a great deal of training to conduct a dramatic terrorist attack. In April 2013, two men at the Boston Marathon killed three people, injured 275 others and paralyzed the city. The Boston attacks serve as an important reminder that attacks need not be sophisticated to be deadly. Indeed, a survey of terrorists' attack plots in the United States over the past decade reveals a trend remarkable for the simplicity of attack plans. Fire as a weapon, by itself or along with other tactics, presents significant challenges that first responders and security forces must contend with in planning, preparation and drills.

Complexities in Responding to Multi-Modality Attacks Involving Fire

FDNY research and preparedness efforts on fire as a weapon have centered on what is now known as the "Mumbai-style attack method." The salient features of a Mumbai-style attack include:

- multiple attackers,
- multiple targets and
- multiple weapon types (guns, explosives and fire)
- deployed over a prolonged operational period leveraging media attention to amplify the effects of the attack.[6]

These factors create unique challenges for first responders beginning with the ability to quickly and accurately gain situational awareness of the nature and extent of the attack, the need for several command posts to address multiple attack sites and tactics, and techniques and procedures to deal with attacks deploying both fire and other attack modalities (e.g., active shooter).

Fire presents a qualitatively different type of attack when used in conjunction with other attack means. Fire, and its associated smoke, can prove disorienting to a responding force, inhibit ingress to the target, create structural dangers and potentially increase the number of casualties that the security forces will encounter while trying to resolve the situation. These factors present significant challenges to counterterrorism operations.

To address these complex challenges, the FDNY has reaffirmed its relationships with established partners like the NYPD, and forged new partnerships that add essential expertise to develop effective techniques, tactics and procedures. The results of these initiatives are jointly published intelligence bulletins, forward-looking joint exercises and information exchanges that are pushing response models forward.

Several partnerships are worthy of mention: FDNY began meetings with FBI's New York SWAT team to explore the idea of joint tactical teams simultaneously facing armed terrorists, fire and smoke, victims and mass casualties. Discussions and tabletop exercises led to two full-scale exercises that tested this concept. The insights gained from this one-year collaboration with the FBI culminated in the *Interagency Tactical Response Model* released in June 2012.

In May 2012, FDNY began collaboration with a group from the U.S. Army that specialize in rapid solutions to current and anticipated problems on the battlefield. As with the FBI, a series of meetings, training modules and tabletop exercises led to the group's February 2013 "Red Team" paper on *Fire and Smoke as a Weapon*, envisioning a Mumbai-style attack in a hypothetical Manhattan office building in an attempt to gauge emergency responder preparedness related to this novel attack method.

After the Benghazi attacks, the Department of State's Diplomatic Security Service leveraged the FDNY to provide advice to its high-threat response team—the Mobile Security Deployment. Diplomatic Security Service agents were briefed on the most critical features of fire as a weapon. Agents were then put through firefighting training at the FDNY training academy, including extrication of fortified vehicles and a walk-through exercise of a Mumbai-style scenario.

Finally, the FDNY has worked closely with the London Fire Brigade on counterterrorism measures since the 7/7 bombings in 2005. In preparation for the 2012 Olympics, FDNY discussed with London's fire service and the Metropolitan Police Service possible response scenarios to active shooter attacks involving fire in multiple locations.

Leading Role of FDNY in National Homeland Security Efforts

As consumers of intelligence, and the first line of defense when terrorist attacks occur, emergency responders require the best intelligence to carry out their duties across all mission areas. The understanding of the threat environment drives training initiatives, general awareness, safety protocols, operating procedures and risk management.

The fire service, however, is more than a consumer of intelligence. It is also a producer of intelligence as a non-traditional intelligence partner to the intelligence community. Firefighters and emergency medical personnel offer unique perspectives to more established intelligence partners and law enforcement, adding richness and insights in the understanding of the vulnerabilities and consequences related to varying threat streams. For more than five years, the FDNY has produced a weekly intelligence product called the *Watchline*, balancing a strategic focus with operational relevance to its primary readership: emergency responders. Fire service intelligence serves not only the response community but its intelligence partners with the delivery of tailored intelligence on the latest threats, trends, events and innovations that affect these groups, including the use of fire as a weapon on the world stage.

FDNY has also sent one of its officers to the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) on a one-year detail where the officer not only receives the latest intelligence and threat data, but also provides the intelligence community with fire service subject matter expertise on a broad range of issues related to emergency responders. NCTC has committed to providing first responders with the best threat intelligence so they can operate safely in performing their life saving mission, and recognizes the intrinsic value of this non-traditional partnership.

In addition, the FDNY collaborates with other partners throughout the intelligence community on the production of intelligence products. In

6 Fire Department in the City of New York, "Defining a Mumbai-style Attack," *Fireguard*, April, 2011.

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May 2012, the Department of Homeland Security Office of Intelligence and Analysis released *Terrorist Interest in Using Fire as a Weapon*, written in close consultation with the FDNY. Key findings centered on the advantages of using fire over other terrorist tactics, potential for mass casualties, economic damage and emergency resource depletion.

Working with the Department of Defense's Combating Terrorism Technical Support Office and New Mexico Tech's Energetic Materials Research and Testing Center, the FDNY wants to examine the vulnerability of high-rise building fire suppression systems. This interagency group hopes to construct a fire protection system and building mock-up for the purpose of testing blast effects on standpipes and sprinklers. Test results could then be used to inform first responders, Homeland Security and the State Department of the level of vulnerability of a combination attack of IEDs and fire.

Conclusion

This type of interagency and international collaboration by the FDNY demonstrates the importance of multi-agency solutions to these complex problems. In an era of ever constraining resources, it is critical that organizations such as the FDNY leverage their expertise to support broader audiences in the face of a dynamic and resilient enemy. The recognition of terrorists' interest in the use of fire as a weapon and the resulting complexities are important considerations for all first responders and security forces.

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The Syrian Spillover and Salafist Radicalization in Lebanon

By Bilal Y. Saab

CONFLICT WITH THE Sunnis, who constitute the majority of all Muslims in the Middle East and around the world, is a scenario that severely undermines the long-term interests of Lebanese Hizb Allah. Not only would such a religious war be a costly distraction from the military struggle against Israel, but it would also be a strategic blunder because of its likely effects of endangering Hizb Allah's Shi`a support base and consequently threatening the organization's existence.[1] For the past decade, however, Hizb Allah has failed to fend off the specter of sectarian war, provoking and alienating the Lebanese Sunni community.[2] Yet it is Hizb Allah's military intervention in Syria, designed to prevent the collapse of an allied Syrian government and to maintain vital supply lines, that constitutes the most serious and immediate action that could precipitate Sunni-Shi`a conflict in Lebanon.

While it is evident that Sunni-Shi`a tensions in Lebanon and the Middle East have risen partly because of the Syrian crisis, it is less clear how the Syrian spillover has radicalized larger parts of Lebanon's Sunni Islamist community.[3] Sunni militancy is no stranger to Lebanon's landscape, having existed in several forms since the 1970s. Over the years, it has sporadically caused bouts of violence and criminal activity in the northern region and in the Palestinian refugee camps.[4]

The deadliest encounter between Lebanese authorities and Sunni militancy occurred in the summer of 2007 when the Lebanese army was forced to destroy the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr al-Bared to eradicate the threat of Fatah al-Islam, a Salafi-jihadi group that was growing in size and influence in the northern part of the country.[5] The most recent violent clash between the Lebanese army and Salafi-jihadis, however, occurred in Abra, a neighborhood in the southern city of Sidon, in late June 2013.[6] Lebanese Salafist Shaykh Ahmad al-Assir, along with several of his armed followers, ambushed a Lebanese army checkpoint on June 23, causing a two-day battle that killed 17 Lebanese soldiers and dozens of al-Assir's gunmen.[7] Al-Assir's fighting force was ultimately defeated and the Lebanese army took control of his security compound, but the shaykh himself supposedly managed to escape. His whereabouts are still unknown.[8]

This article provides an assessment of the effects of the war in Syria on the growth trajectory of Lebanon's Salafi-jihadis, clarifying the old and new actors, their clout in the north and in the Palestinian refugee camps, and their military involvement in Syria. It also looks specifically at the case of Ahmad al-Assir, assessing the implications of his recent rise and fall in Abra. The article finds that despite increased

1 Regional demographics have worked against Hizb Allah and the Shi`a. Therefore, even the staunchest Lebanese Shi`a supporters of Hizb Allah would prefer to be at peace with Sunni Lebanese and their broader environment, which is predominantly Sunni.

2 These actions include removing the Lebanese Sunni community's leader, Saad Hariri, from power in a so-called coup in 2011, and allegedly participating in a spate of assassinations of its most influential figures including former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri (the father of Saad) in February 2005 and Brigadier General Wissam al-Hassan, chief of the Intelligence Bureau of the Lebanese Internal Security Forces, in October 2012. See "Hariri Supporters Accuse Hezbollah of Lebanon Coup," Reuters, January 24, 2011; "Hezbollah Suspects to be Tried Over Rafik Hariri," BBC, August 17, 2011; "Hezbollah-led Govt Blamed for Murder of Top Lebanese Security Official," al-Arabiya, October 20, 2012.

3 All officially recognized sects that compose Lebanese society are considered minorities. Indeed, there is no religious or communal majority in Lebanon. It is difficult to determine more precise numbers on sectarian representation in Lebanon because the last time the country had an official census was in 1932 due to political sensitivities.

4 Bilal Y. Saab, "Lebanon at Risk from Salafi-Jihadi Terrorist Cells," *CTC Sentinel* 3:2 (2010); Bilal Y. Saab, "The Failure of Salafi-Jihadi Insurgent Movements in the Levant," *CTC Sentinel* 2:9 (2009).

5 Saab, "Lebanon at Risk from Salafi-Jihadi Terrorist Cells"; Thanassis Cambanis, "Desolation Awaits Returning Palestinian Refugees," *New York Times*, October 11, 2007.

6 Mohammed Zaatari and Antoine Amrieh, "Sidon Leaders Demand Post-Abra Probe," *Daily Star* [Beirut], June 29, 2013.

7 Ibid.; Anne Barnard, "Calm Returns to Lebanese City, but Tensions Remain," *New York Times*, June 25, 2013.

8 Ibid.

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Sunni-Shi`a tensions and political polarization in Lebanon due to the Syrian crisis and sectarian violence in the Middle East, and despite a leadership void in the Lebanese Sunni political class, Salafi-jihadis still do not enjoy a popular following among Lebanese Sunnis. Indeed, their presence consists of cells and small groups, not a large and armed social movement that has attained insurgent status. Nevertheless, Hizb Allah's intervention in Syria is a powerful catalyst for the radicalization of larger parts of the Sunni Islamist and specifically Salafist communities in Lebanon. This radicalization process could threaten Hizb Allah and potentially bring about Sunni-Shi`a conflict in Lebanon.

Evidence of Jabhat al-Nusra Activity in Lebanon

As the war in Syria rages, there is growing evidence of Salafi-jihadi activity in Lebanon. *Al-Monitor* reported in April 2013 that "it can no longer be denied that Jabhat al-Nusra[9] has found fertile ground in the Palestinian refugee camps in [Lebanon], among the nearly one million Syrian refugees there, as well as in Lebanese Sunni areas, especially in northern Lebanon near the Syrian border."[10] In July 2013, Lebanon's military charged six alleged members of Jabhat al-Nusra with forming an armed gang with the intent to conduct terrorist attacks in Lebanon.[11]

Five months earlier, in February 2013, Lebanon's *al-Akhbar* newspaper published a report claiming that Salafi-jihadis in Lebanon could be close to establishing a Jabhat al-Nusra branch in the country.[12] *Al-Akhbar* journalist Nasser Sharara claimed that "H.A. Dargham," a Lebanese man, proclaimed to his followers in February that the creation of the Lebanese branch of Jabhat al-Nusra was drawing near.[13] According to the report, the site of Dargham's pronouncement was in the town of Arsal, located in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley near the Syrian border, a Hizb Allah stronghold.[14] According to the Lebanese military intelligence services, who were cited in the *al-Akhbar* report, Dargham is also an associate of Khaled Hamid who is reported to be a major "logistical facilitator" between Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria and its allies in Lebanon's north and in the Palestinian refugee camp of Ain al-Hilwah in Sidon, including Fatah al-Islam[15] and Jund al-Sham.[16]

The idea of a Lebanese branch of Jabhat al-Nusra reportedly started with the Saudi national Majid bin Muhammad al-Majid, the *amir* of the Abdullah Azzam Brigades.[17] In June 2012, the Abdullah Azzam Brigades announced that al-Majid was their leader, and that the group supports the revolution in Syria.[18] Yet the *al-Akhbar* report in February 2013—which has not been corroborated by other sources—claimed that al-Majid traveled from Ain al-Hilwah to Syria in late 2011 along with cadres from Fatah al-Islam and Jund al-Sham for the purpose of reportedly dethroning Abu Muhammad al-Julani, the head of Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria, and replacing him as the *amir* (leader).[19] A sizeable but unspecified number of his comrades, however, defected from his ranks during travel for unknown reasons, and joined al-Julani instead, forcing al-Majid to return to Ain al-Hilwah.[20] According to the report, these skilled fighters later trained al-Julani's forces, ultimately helping to make his Jabhat al-Nusra the most effective and resourceful actor in the Syrian militant opposition.[21]

If a Lebanese branch of Jabhat al-Nusra were to be formed today, it would likely be composed of two main battalions: an Ain al-Hilwah battalion and a Tripoli battalion.[22]

The Ain al-Hilwah battalion would probably include the remaining cadres and fighters of Fatah al-Islam and Jund al-Sham, the Abdullah Azzam Brigades and the Platoons of Ziad al-Jarrah.[23] The gradual weakening of the secular Palestinian party Fatah in Ain al-Hilwah has allowed these Salafi-jihadi entities to increase their presence and mobilize greater numbers of men from the al-Ta'mir area of the camp, also at the expense of older and larger Sunni Islamist Palestinian factions such as Asbat al-Ansar,[24]

9 Jabhat al-Nusra is a Salafi-jihadi insurgent group operating in Syria that has established ties to al-Qa`ida and has been designated a "terrorist" group by the U.S. State Department. The U.S. government views Jabhat al-Nusra as a "front group" for al-Qa`ida in Iraq.

10 "Hezbollah Prepares for Attacks by Jabhat al-Nusra in Lebanon," *al-Monitor*, April 26, 2013.

11 "Six Men Charged for Plotting Terror Acts in Lebanon," *Daily Star*, July 19, 2013. For other evidence of possible Jabhat al-Nusra activity in Lebanon, see Jean Aziz, "Jabhat al-Nusra Reportedly in Lebanon," *al-Monitor*, December 24, 2012; Mitchell Prothero, "Al Qaida-linked Nusra Front Rebels Blamed for Bloody Fight Against Lebanese Army in Sidon," McClatchy Newspapers, June 26, 2013.

12 Nasser Sharara, "Jabhat al-Nusra From Northern Syria to Southern Lebanon," *al-Akhbar*, February 25, 2013; Nasser Charara, "Coming Soon: Al-Nusra Front in Lebanon," *al-Akhbar*, February 25, 2013; Kassem Kassem and Amal Khalil, "Ein el Helweh fi Intithar wiladat fir' li 'Jabhat al Nusra,'" *al-Akhbar*, February 4, 2013; Ja`far al-Attar, "Al Assir...Al Nusra wal Qa'ida," *as-Safir*, June 24, 2013.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Fatah al-Islam is a militant Sunni Islamist group that is inspired by al-Qa`ida's ideology. Its members are mostly Arabs from various Middle Eastern countries. It emerged in the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon in November 2006. Its goals are unclear but include the establishment of an Islamic state in northern Lebanon.

16 Sharara, "Jabhat al-Nusra From Northern Syria to Southern Lebanon." Jund al-Sham is a title claimed by several Sunni Islamic extremist entities, all or none of which may be connected. These entities mostly operate in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, and their goals include the establishment of an Islamic caliphate throughout the Levant.

17 Sharara, "Jabhat al-Nusra From Northern Syria to Southern Lebanon"; Bill Roggio, "Abdullah Azzam Brigades Names Leader, Advises Against Attacks in Syria's Cities," *The Long War Journal*, June 27, 2012.

18 Roggio.

19 Sharara, "Jabhat al-Nusra From Northern Syria to Southern Lebanon."

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 These two battalions do not exist in name. The author contends that if a Lebanese branch of Jabhat al-Nusra—or some other coordinated, jihadist entity—were to be formed in Lebanon, then its fighters would likely coalesce into two separate factions/battalions.

23 The "Platoons of Ziad al-Jarrah" is often referred to as a brigade that operates under the command of the Abdullah Azzam Brigades. See, for example, "Who Are The Abdullah Azzam Brigades?" Reuters, August 4, 2010.

24 Asbat al-Ansar is a Palestinian Salafi-jihadi group that was involved in a number of terrorist operations against Lebanese official targets in the past, including the killings of four judges in a courtroom in Sidon in June 1999. Recently, it reached a permanent truce with the Lebanese authorities in return for its intelligence cooperation on al-Qa`ida elements in the Ain al-Hilwah camp. For details of the incident in 1999, see Audrey Kurth Cronin et al., "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," CRS Report for Congress, February 6, 2004.

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Ansar Allah,[25] Hamas, and al-Haraka al-Islamiyya al-Mujahida,[26] which are described by these extremist groups as more "moderate" and insufficiently committed to supporting the jihad in Syria.[27]

As for the "Tripoli battalion," it would likely comprise militants who follow Lebanese Sunni Shaykh Hussam Sabbagh.[28] Sabbagh has reportedly helped smuggle militants across the border into Syria, and he has fought with Jabhat al-Nusra rebels against the al-Assad regime in Syria.[29] According to Lebanon's *Daily Star*, "The Nusra Front and other Syrian Islamist fighting groups now use him [Sabbagh] as their foremost representative in Lebanon, and [Sabbagh] coordinates between various groups who hope to establish an Islamic emirate in Tripoli."[30] He has approximately 250 followers.[31]

Fatah al-Islam Still Active

Since Jund al-Sham and Fatah al-Islam would likely be incorporated into a Lebanese branch of Jabhat al-Nusra—or another Salafi-jihadi entity in Lebanon—it is worth assessing their current capabilities. Other than being accurately labeled by Lebanon commentators as freelance jihadist fighters lacking any organizational structure or *modus vivendi*, not much else is known about the current state of Jund al-Sham. The group used to be part of the larger and much more influential Asbat al-Ansar until several members defected due to differences over ideology, politics, and jihadist strategy and priorities.[32] Today, Jund al-Sham likely consists of a small group of fighters who are "looking for action and trouble and the right opportunity to merge with a like-minded movement," as one Lebanese internal security officer told this author over the telephone in May 2013.[33]

It is Fatah al-Islam that may have to do the heavy lifting should Salafi-jihadis in Lebanon coordinate their activities. Knowing the devastating losses it suffered in the battle of Nahr al-Bared in the summer of 2007, one would think that Fatah al-Islam is defunct or poses a marginal security threat.[34] That would be a false conclusion. Although the group's organizational structure was crushed, most of its members killed or jailed (some fled), and its size and influence much reduced, it still has a presence in Lebanon in the form of scattered cells, most notably in the north, as well as in Ain al-Hilwah and ironically Roumieh, Lebanon's largest prison.[35]

"As the war in Syria rages, there is growing evidence of Salafi-jihadi activity in Lebanon."

There are a number of ways that the group has managed to survive and stay active during the past couple of years—even from behind bars in Roumieh. Of the 480 people suspected of involvement in the Nahr al-Bared battle, more than 200 are being held in Roumieh.[36] Members of Fatah al-Islam, who number 88 according to court reports and the Lebanese Judicial Council, are among the most problematic and powerful prisoners at Roumieh.[37] Small in number compared to others, they are the strongest physically, and the most influential and resourceful.[38]

Perhaps more consequential than Fatah al-Islam's presence inside Roumieh is the group's ability to communicate with Salafi-jihadi fighters operating in Lebanon and Syria, as well as manage its remaining cadre. Although prisoners in general have mobile telephones at their disposal in Roumieh, Islamists, and Fatah al-Islam members particularly, carry laptops, allowing them to publish statements on Islamist online forums.[39]

Several escapes and foiled attempts by ordinary criminals and Salafi-jihadis from Roumieh have been reported over the years. Perhaps the single most important incident, other than the case of Walid al-Bustani,[40] occurred in mid-2012, when five prisoners—four of whom were Fatah al-Islam members—escaped using sheets to scale the prison wall. Muhammad Abdullah al-Dousari, also known as "Abu Talha al-Kuwaiti," led the group of four and was described by Lebanese media in December 2012 as "the ambassador of al-Qa`ida in Lebanon."[41] The three others were Abdullah al-Shukri and Abdul Aziz al-Masri from Syria and Abdul Nasser Sanjar from Lebanon.[42] Al-Dousari's group may have been ambushed by the Syrian military, with one member killed and the others reportedly arrested.[43]

25 Ansar Allah was founded in southern Gaza in November 2008 as an armed Sunni Islamist group with strong Salafi-jihadi credentials. Its goals include the establishment of an Islamic state in Gaza.

26 Al-Haraka al-Islamiyya al-Mujahida is a Salafi-jihadi group that was founded in 1984 by Jamal Khattab and Abdallah Hallaq, allegedly with the help of Iran. Its base is the Palestinian refugee camp of Ain al-Hilwah. Khattab has good relations with Hizb Allah and Hamas.

27 Kassem and Khalil.

28 Sharara, "Jabhat al-Nusra From Northern Syria to Southern Lebanon"; Misbah al-Ali, "Who is Sabbagh? A Look into the Life of the Sheikh and Fighter," *Daily Star*, January 15, 2013. Sabbagh has called for an Islamic emirate that unites all Salafi-jihadi entities operating in Lebanon and Syria under one umbrella and covers geographical areas from northern Lebanon and the outskirts of the Syrian city of Homs.

29 Al-Ali.

30 Ibid.; Sharara, "Jabhat al-Nusra From Northern Syria to Southern Lebanon."

31 Ibid.

32 Roger Hardy, "Profile: Jund al-Sham," BBC, June 4, 2007. For more on Jund al-Sham, see Bilal Y. Saab and Magnus Ranstorp, "Securing Lebanon from the Threat of Salafist Jihadism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30:10 (2007).

33 Personal interview, Lebanese internal security officer, May 2013.

34 Saab, "Lebanon at Risk from Salafi-Jihadi Terrorist Cells."

35 Ibid.; Ja`far al-Attar, "Lebanon Prison 'Controlled by Islamists,'" *as-Safir*, January 30, 2013.

36 Kassem Kassem, "Ein el Helweh: Al Lino ya'oud li sahk al Nusra," *al-Akhbar*, February 20, 2013.

37 Kassem and Khalil.

38 Ibid.; Al-Attar, "Lebanon Prison 'Controlled by Islamists.'"

39 Ibid.

40 One notable example of communication and coordination between imprisoned Fatah al-Islam members and like-minded extremists from the outside is the case of Walid al-Bustani. Al-Bustani, a Salafi-jihadi who fought in the Nahr al-Bared battle, escaped from Roumieh in mid-2012, but was later executed by Syrian rebels in the town of Tel Kalakh. For details, see "Fatah al-Islam Militants Killed in Syria," *Daily Star*, April 24, 2012; Al-Attar, "Lebanon Prison 'Controlled by Islamists'"; Radwan Mortada, "Roumieh Prison: Rule by the Sword," *al-Akhbar*, October 14, 2012.

41 "Kuwaiti Tried to Set Up Al-Qaeda camp – Report," *Daily Star*, May 27, 2009.

42 Ibid.

43 Doha Shams, "Abu Talha wal mashrou` al Qa'idi fi Lubnan," *al-Akhbar*, December 27, 2012.

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Another significant escape from Roumieh by Fatah al-Islam members occurred in September-October 2012. The Lebanese press reported that Omar Othman from Syria, Faisal Aqla from Algeria, and Mahmoud Fallah from Palestine managed to escape from the prison and join their comrades in Syria.[44] A couple of months later, Roumieh's administration reported that prison guards had foiled another major group escape attempt by more than 20 Fatah al-Islam detainees.[45]

In addition to those who have escaped, some of the Islamist detainees in Roumieh who were eventually freed have also opted to commit violent acts against the Syrian government in Syria. The case of Khaled Mahmoud, once one of the leaders of Fatah al-Islam, is well known in Lebanese circles.[46] Mahmoud was released in June 2012 despite his militant activities against the Lebanese army in Nahr al-Bared. Six months after his discharge, he appeared in an online video surrounded by militants and declared the establishment of the Syrian version of Jund al-Sham.[47]

Mahmoud is believed to be responsible for dispatching Lebanese youths to Syria for militant aims.[48] According to reports from *al-Akhbar*, Lebanese security reports indicate that "Yahia J.," a close associate of Mahmoud, is in charge of recruiting and deploying Salafi-jihadis to Syria, including the group that was reportedly ambushed by the Syrian army in Tel Kalakh in November 2012.[49] Such reports suggest that Yahia, who is based in Tripoli, along with "Nader H." and "Bashir M.," are actively involved in recruiting Salafi-jihadi cells.[50] The latter two were previously detained on charges of belonging to Fatah al-Islam and spent one and three years, respectively, in prison.[51]

According to the Lebanese media, Mahmoud, the *amir*, reportedly entered Syrian territory through the Mashari al-Qaa region of eastern Lebanon.[52] From there, he traveled to Syria where he became the commander of an armed group stationed at a historic crusader castle in the Krak des Chevaliers area.[53] Shortly afterward, more than 20 Lebanese Salafi-jihadis joined Mahmoud there from Tripoli, swearing allegiance to him.[54] According to the *Washington Post*, Mahmoud is linked to the Lebanese Shaykh Sabbagh, who has been reported by Lebanese media to be recruiting youths in Tripoli to fight in Syria.[55]

The Rapid Rise and Fall of Ahmad al-Assir

The case of Ahmad al-Assir sheds further light on the evolving state of Sunni militancy in Lebanon, and the outcome of the battle he waged against the Lebanese army carries important implications for the growth trajectory of Salafi-jihadism in Lebanon.[56]

The fact that al-Assir's men lost the battle of Abra in Sidon in June 2013 may suggest that Salafi-jihadism in Lebanon has suffered a major blow.[57] Unfortunately, that is only partially true because al-Assir emerged under crisis conditions that are still very much relevant in today's domestic and regional environment: a raging civil war in Syria pitting Sunnis against Alawites and spilling over into Lebanon, extremely tense Sunni-Shi`a relations in Lebanon, severe political instability in Beirut, and a leadership void within the Lebanese Sunni community that has allowed radical Sunni elements to assume, by default, more prominent sociopolitical roles at the expense of secular figures. As long as these conditions exist, another al-Assir could arise.

"There is a sense of anxiety in Lebanon about the increased potential for Sunni-Shi`a conflict."

Three important observations on the outcome of the battle of Abra, however, support the argument that Salafi-jihadism, despite all the external factors enabling its growth and expansion, still faces major challenges in finding a solid popular base and a permanent home in Lebanon.

First, despite two public calls by al-Assir during the battle for Sunnis to join him in the fight and for Sunni soldiers to defect from the Lebanese army, the Salafist shaykh's requests fell on deaf ears.[58] This same scenario happened in the battle in Nahr al-Bared in 2007 when Fatah al-Islam was forced to fight the Lebanese army alone. Militants from Ain al-Hilwah were supposed to lend their full support to Fatah al-Islam in the past and al-Assir at present, but militants in the camp remained relatively calm, distancing themselves from the fighting, despite a few minor attacks against the Lebanese army in the Ta'amir area by elements of Jund al-Sham and remnants of

44 "Judge Orders Roumieh Warden Detained," *Daily Star*, October 15, 2012.

45 "Police Thwart Roumieh Escape Attempt by Suspected Islamists," *Daily Star*, December 13, 2012.

46 Babak Dehghanpisheh and Suzan Haidamous, "More Lebanese Sunnis are Crossing into Syria to Aid Rebellion, Officials Say," *Washington Post*, January 26, 2013.

47 Kassem; Radwan Mortada, "Khaled Mahmoud: A Prisoner in Lebanon Turns Emir in Syria," *al-Akhbar*, January 4, 2013; Dehghanpisheh and Haidamous.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Mortada, "Khaled Mahmoud: A Prisoner in Lebanon Turns Emir in Syria."

51 Ibid.

52 Doha Shams, "Layali al Shamal al Hazina Tatarakkab al-`Arka al Kabira," *al-Akhbar*, February 25, 2013; Dehghanpisheh and Haidamous.

53 Shams, "Layali al Shamal al Hazina Tatarakkab al-`Arka al Kabira."

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.; Dehghanpisheh and Haidamous.

56 Ahmad al-Assir rose to prominence a year ago when he and his followers blocked a main road leading to southern Lebanon for a month and a half, a move that allegedly was part of a broader strategy for creating a Sunni militia that would ultimately face Hizb Allah. The Salafist shaykh began his mobilization campaign by recruiting young Lebanese using a highly sectarian and anti-Hizb Allah speech. He attracted Lebanese nationals, Palestinian refugees, Syrians, and other Arabs to his anti-Shi`a cause. Once established in Sidon, he visited other areas including Arsal and Tripoli, hoping to expand his movement and reach the northern Sunni part of the country. From June 2012 to June 2013, he reportedly benefited from funding provided by Gulf and local, unknown sources. He allegedly used the money to buy weapons from Ain al-Hilwah. For details, see Amal Khalil, "Al Sheikh Assir Wal Thalath Sa'at Al 'Ro'b Fi Janoub Loubnan," *al-Akhbar*, June 20, 2013; Dana Moukhallati, "Breaking Down Ahmad al-Assir: The Man Behind the Beard," al-Arabiya, June 25, 2013; "What Happened to Fadel Shaker?" *al-Monitor*, July 4, 2013.

57 Ibid.

58 Mohammad Saleh, "Al Assir You'lin 'Harbahou' 'ala al Jaysh," *as-Safir*, June 24, 2013.

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Fatah al-Islam led by Bilal bin Badr.[59] Less radical Islamist actors who are in disagreement with Fatah al-Islam and Jund al-Sham—including the influential Asbat al-Ansar, Hamas, and al-Jihad al-Islami—assisted the Lebanese army and worked toward preserving the relative peace in Ain al-Hilwah.[60] These actors, along with the secular Fatah, played the same role in 2007 as a rational attempt to protect their own interests.

Second, the battle of Abra would have been the perfect opportunity for the so-called Lebanese branch of Jabhat al-Nusra to be established. Such a development, however, did not occur, and the reasons are unclear. Perhaps the project was not ready for implementation, or it was too ambitious. Regardless, it raises questions about the prospects, or even existence, of this potentially new Salafi-jihadi enterprise in Lebanon.

Third, despite their anger at Hizb Allah over its military involvement in Syria, major secular political figures in the Lebanese Sunni community—including Saad Hariri and Fouad Siniora—condemned the attack in Abra and sided with the Lebanese army and state institutions.[61] Equally important, the most influential Salafist leader in Lebanon, Shaykh Da'i al-Islam al-Shahal (son of Salem al-Shahal, the founder of the Salafist movement in Lebanon), remained silent and did not lend his full support (at least publicly) to al-Assir, making it clear that the Salafist community in Lebanon is not united in its stance against the Lebanese army. Indeed, neither Beirut's nor the north's Salafists erupted during or after the fighting, and al-Assir's supporters in Tripoli refrained from starting a diversionary battle and opening another front against the Lebanese army to potentially come to the rescue of their "champion."

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

Conclusion

From Arsal to Wadi Khaled, from Tripoli to Akkar, and from Sidon to the heart of Beirut, black Salafi-jihadi flags and banners have been spotted in increasing numbers, a picture unseen before in Lebanon's history.[62] The Lebanese people used to take lightly the tirades of al-Assir against Hizb Allah and the Shi`a. This is no longer true, given the Salafist shaykh's growing but still relatively small support base. There is a sense of anxiety in Lebanon about the increased potential for Sunni-Shi`a conflict. Hizb Allah is on edge and high alert, and despite its strategic interest in avoiding civil unrest in Lebanon, the organization, if it feels threatened, could lash out against fellow Lebanese, as it did in May 2008.[63]

This tense and sectarian environment in Lebanon, should it explode, is a development that the Lebanese army, due to its modest resources and a divided political leadership in Beirut, is likely incapable of pacifying.

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62 During the past year, Lebanese news agencies including al-Jadeed, MTV, and LBC have reported in their evening news on the Sunni Islamist and Salafist demonstrations and rallies in Lebanon's northern region and Beirut, showing footage of bearded men waving black flags of al-Qa`ida. Also see Dehghanpisheh and Haidamous.

63 In response to the Lebanese government's decision to shut down Hizb Allah's telecommunications network and sack airport security chief Wafic Choucair (a man close to Hizb Allah), the Shi`a group took over parts of West Beirut, a move described by its rivals in the pro-Western March 14 coalition as an "armed coup." See Robert F. Worth and Nada Bakri, "Hezbollah Seizes Swath of Beirut From U.S.-Backed Lebanon Government," *New York Times*, May 10, 2008.

Anti-Muslim Attacks in Myanmar Threaten Uptick in Regional Violence and Islamist Activism

By James Brandon

DURING THE LAST 18 months, a surge of communal violence between Muslims and Buddhists in Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) has killed at least 180 people and displaced more than 120,000, the vast majority of them members of the country's one million-strong Muslim minority.[1] These events, accompanied by instances of official government discrimination against Muslims, has prompted a range of attacks on Buddhists throughout the region, including an attack in July 2013 on the Bodh Gaya, India's most important Buddhist temple, and in Bangladesh, Indonesia and Malaysia. Myanmar's perceived mistreatment of Muslims has also galvanized a wide range of Islamist and jihadist groups from the Middle East to Australia and the United Kingdom.

This article provides background on militancy among Rohingya Muslims, highlights recent regional incidents of related anti-Buddhist violence, and examines the potential for a wider uptick in Islamist militancy over the issue. It finds that Islamist organizations, as well as jihadist groups, are increasingly incorporating developments in Myanmar into their propaganda campaigns, as well as including Myanmar's interests in their targeting selection.

Background

There are approximately one million Muslims living in Myanmar, a country of 55 million people.[2] Around 800,000 of these are from the Rohingya ethnic minority, a group concentrated in the country's southwestern Rahkine State (formerly known as Arakan State).[3] The Rohingya typically argue that

1 "Unpunished Crimes Against Humanity, Humanitarian Crisis in Arakan State," Human Rights Watch, April 22, 2013. Rahkine State was known as Arakan State until 1989.

2 Thomas Fuller, "Extremism Rises Among Myanmar Buddhists," *New York Times*, June 20, 2013.

3 Araminta Wordsworth, "Burmese Sleepwalking Into 'Ethnic Cleansing,'" *National Post*, July 13, 2013.

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they are indigenous to the area, but many Burmese claim that they are relatively recent immigrants from Bangladesh, where many Rohingya also live. Regardless, tensions between Buddhists and Muslims in Myanmar are long-standing.[4] The recent unrest, however, is the worst in at least a decade—involving widespread attacks on Muslim homes and businesses.

The violence has primarily been conducted by Buddhist civilians, although there are credible reports of the authorities turning a blind eye or tacitly supporting the violence.[5] There are examples of Buddhist monks (notably Ashin Wirathu from the Buddhist 969 movement) inciting hatred against Muslims; this intolerance can easily lead to violence over local issues. There are also allegations of some monks directly taking part in the violence.[6] The Myanmar government itself has imposed discriminatory measures against Muslims, notably a two-child limit on some Muslim families.[7] The unrest has been concentrated in the country's southwestern Rahkine State, as well as in central towns such as Meiktila and Shan State in the west. In contrast to previous outbreaks of conflict, however, news of the latest violence has impacted Muslims outside of the country. This is largely due to the growth of social media, which has dramatically raised awareness of the plight of Myanmar's Muslims. The country may also have gained a greater significance to the global Muslim community due to high profile U.S. and Western engagement with Myanmar during the last two years.[8]

"The recent uptick both in intra-communal violence against Muslims and the government's latest intolerance toward Muslims could prompt Islamist radicalization."

Rohingya Armed Groups

Myanmar has been challenged by a range of armed separatist groups representing Rohingya Muslims since its independence in 1948 when the self-described "Mujahidin," a term that embraced activists from a range of groups, began fighting for some form of self-government, ranging from autonomy to full independence. Since then, various armed groups have been periodically active, such as the Rohingya Liberation Party in the 1970s. All of these groups have had a limited impact, with most being broken up by Myanmar's efficient security apparatus or forced abroad.

The most active current group is the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) based largely in neighboring Bangladesh. The RSO, which has a limited capacity in Myanmar, is widely accused of working with radical Bangladeshi groups, including the two banned jihadist groups Jamaatul Mujahidin Bangladesh (JMB) and Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islam-Bangladesh (HuJI-B). The RSO has denied these links.[9] Separately, a range of media outlets and commentators have alleged that the RSO, along with the Arakan Rohingya National Organization and individual Rohingya, have had contact with foreign militant groups such as the Taliban.[10] These claims, however, are difficult to substantiate. Likewise, in July 2013, radical Islamist websites reported that a group of jihadists from Bangladesh, Indonesia and Myanmar had entered Myanmar and killed 17 Burmese soldiers and claimed that Rohingya Muslims were being trained by militants in Bangladesh; the claim was denied by Myanmar's government.[11]

More credibly, the RSO is accused of stoking anti-Buddhist violence in Bangladesh and of involvement with radical Bangladeshi groups.[12] For example, the group was accused of involvement in the September 2012 attacks in Ramu in Cox's Bazaar district in Bangladesh, in which mobs attacked and destroyed 12 Buddhist temples and more than 50 houses, in apparent revenge for attacks by Buddhists in Myanmar, although the unrest also seems to have been stirred up through social media.[13] In March 2013, Hafez Sanaul Islam, a senior RSO leader, was arrested by Bangladeshi police over the violence, along with several other Rohingya refugees, illustrating the potential for hard line Rohingya activists to use the issue to stoke violence abroad.[14]

While the RSO stages periodic attacks in Myanmar—for example, the government blamed the group for a minor cross-border attack from Bangladesh in November 2012—there is no evidence that militant Islamism has enjoyed significant traction among Rohingya. This may be because Islamist groups such as Jamaat-i-Islami,[15] which can create environments in which jihadist

4 Although the precise origin of the Rohingya is contested, it seems likely that while significant numbers of Rohingya have lived in the area for centuries, others arrived from Bangladesh during the British colonial period in 1826-1948.

5 "Unpunished Crimes Against Humanity, Humanitarian Crisis in Arakan State"; Kate Hodal, "Video Shows Burmese Police Standing by as Buddhists Attack Muslims," *Guardian*, April 22, 2013.

6 Hodal; Jared Ferrie, "Buddhist Mobs Attack Muslim Homes in Myanmar, One Dead," Reuters, May 29, 2013.

7 "What is Behind Burma's Wave of Religious Violence?" BBC, April 4, 2013; "One Region in Myanmar Limits Births of Muslims," Associated Press, May 25, 2013.

8 Previously, there was little awareness of Myanmar even from regional Islamist groups.

9 "RSO Press Release: Statement in Response of the News Reports of the Daily Star, Dhaka, Bangladesh and Indonesia," Rohingya Solidarity Organization, May 21, 2009. The Australian government has categorized the RSO with groups such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the Philippines that are "not primarily anti-Western" and are instead largely motivated by "local socio-political and economic grievances." See "Transnational Terrorism: The Threat to Australia," Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2004.

10 For example, in 2002 CNN said it had found an al-Qa`ida tape in Afghanistan that showed jihadists training in Burma in 1990. See "Exclusive Tapes Reveal al Qaeda's Capabilities," CNN, August 23, 2002.

11 "Jihad Started in Burma," Kavkaz Center, July 12, 2012; "Myanmar Bins Reports of Rohingyas' Military Training," *Daily Star* [Dhaka], July 13, 2013.

12 "Rohingya Rebels Trained JMB Men," *Daily Star*, May 19, 2009.

13 "Man Held for Link with Ramu Attacks," *Daily Star*, October 31, 2012; "Rohingya Accused of Sparking Bangladesh Riots," *The Irrawaddy*, October 1, 2012.

14 "Rohingya Groups Under Scanner," *Daily Star*, October 7, 2012; "Remand of Ramu Violence 'Plotter' Sought," BDNews24, March 23, 2013.

15 Jamaat-i-Islami was founded in 1941 in British-run India by Abu al-A`la Mawdudi, which broke in different, but closely-associated, national movements following the creation of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh as separate states.

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groups can flourish, have gained little purchase in the country. Similarly, Wahhabism and other forms of Salafi Islam have made few visible inroads among the Rohingya, and Islamic practices remain largely traditional, syncretistic, and Sufi-influenced. Additionally, the minimal numbers of Rohingya studying in the West have meant that radicalism has not been imported into the country by returning students.

Current dynamics, however, could change. Although the Myanmar government's harsh rule has historically quashed radical tendencies, the recent uptick both in intra-communal violence against Muslims and the government's latest intolerance toward Muslims could prompt Islamist radicalization. Conversely, however, political liberalization by Myanmar could give Islamists, and particularly non-violent political Islamists, more room to maneuver.[16]

In a possible sign of incidents to come, on July 21, 2013, a small bomb exploded near a Buddhist temple in Mandalay, Myanmar's second-largest city, only meters away from where the 969 leader Ashin Wirathu was speaking.[17] It was not immediately clear who was responsible for the blast.

Regional Islamist Reaction

In addition to the spillover violence in Bangladesh, Myanmar's treatment of Muslim civilians has prompted attacks further afield in both South and Southeast Asia, providing Islamist and jihadist groups with fresh grievances and a new cause with which to rally their followers.

In Indonesia, although overall support for jihadist groups is much reduced from the 1990s, recent events in Myanmar have reenergized the country's small and fragmented radical groups. In May 2013, for example, Indonesian police broke up a terrorist cell that was allegedly planning a bomb attack on the Myanmar Embassy in Jakarta, arresting several people and seizing bomb-making materials.[18] The police added that the suspects were believed to be linked to a previous December 2012 plot to attack U.S. diplomatic and commercial interests in Jakarta and Surabaya.[19] The arrests illustrated both the Indonesian government's ability to contain jihadist groups and an uptick in Islamist activism over the Myanmar issue.

Similarly, Abu Bakar Bashir, the jihadist cleric imprisoned for his role in the Bali bombings, issued an open letter to Myanmar President Thein Sein from prison in July 2012.[20] The letter characterized the actions of Burmese Buddhists as "barbarous" and described how "they burn the homes of Muslims, forbade [Islamic] worship and slaughter them like animals."[21] Bashir also warned that if Myanmar did not improve its treatment of Muslims, "the destruction of the lands [of Myanmar] at the hands of the mujahidin (with the permission of Allah) will take place."[22]

Echoing these sentiments, hundreds of hard line Islamists gathered outside the Myanmar Embassy in Jakarta in May 2013 to call for "jihad in Myanmar," carrying banners declaring "we want to kill Myanmar Buddhists" and "stop genocide in Myanmar."[23] Then, in August 2012, around 1,000 members of the Islamist group Hizb al-Tahrir marched in Jakarta "to show solidarity with the Rohingya who the extremist Buddhists are slaughtering, raping and torturing."[24]

Sporadic violence has also occurred. On April 5, 2013, Rohingya refugees from Myanmar killed eight Burmese Buddhists in a clash at an immigration detention center in Indonesia.[25] The Indonesian authorities said the attack began after Muslim detainees circulated photographs of the violence in Myanmar.[26]

A comparable uptick in tensions and related violence is also visible in normally peaceful Malaysia, with at least four Burmese Buddhists killed in a spate of attacks in the capital Kuala Lumpur in early June 2013.[27] Some reports blamed local Malay Muslims; others said that Rohingya refugees had carried out the attacks. Members of the 969 movement, a hard line Buddhist nationalist group blamed for much of the Myanmar violence, had reportedly visited Malaysia in the last year, which local activists said had contributed to an increase in tensions.[28] Following the June clashes, Malaysia arrested 900 Burmese nationals to preempt further violence, with a police spokesman saying the arrests were intended to "send a clear message to stop this nonsense and not bring the violence over to Malaysia."[29]

Meanwhile, in Pakistan, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) threatened to take "revenge" on Myanmar in July 2012. Although its spokesman Ehsanullah Ehsan warned that they would "attack Burmese interests anywhere," the group rarely carries out attacks abroad.[30] The statement was more likely an attempt to pressure the Pakistani government and to justify fresh attacks against it; Ehsan warned the government to halt relations with Myanmar and close Myanmar's embassy in Islamabad or face the consequences.[31] Likewise, on June 14, 2013, Jamaat-i-Islami held rallies in Lahore where the group's leaders reportedly told followers that thousands of Burmese Muslims were being "martyred" and that their mosques were being demolished.[32]

16 That being said, given the government's reluctance to even accept Rohingya claims to citizenship, this appears unlikely at present.

17 "Blast During Sermon by Radical Myanmar Monk Wounds 4," Reuters, July 22, 2013.

18 "Myanmar Embassy Bomb Plotter Used Facebook to Recruit Followers," *Jakarta Globe*, May 4, 2013.

19 "Bomb Plot Linked Known Cells," *Jakarta Post*, May 4, 2013.

20 "Ustadz Abu Bakar Ba'asyir Letter to the President of Myanmar," Arrahmah.com, August 2, 2012.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 "Radical Rallies in Jakarta Call for Deadly Jihad in Myanmar," *Jakarta Globe*, May 3, 2012.

24 "Solidarity with the Rohingya Muslims by Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia," Khilafah.com, August 6, 2012.

25 "Myanmar Muslims Kill 8 Buddhists in Indonesian Centre," Agence France-Presse, April 5, 2013.

26 Ibid.

27 "Burmese Migrant Community in Malaysia Simmers after Attacks," *The Irrawaddy*, June 13, 2013.

28 Ibid.

29 "Malaysia Arrests 900 Myanmar Nationals in Wake of Violence," Agence France-Presse, June 6, 2012.

30 "Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan Threaten Myanmar over Rohingya," *Express Tribune*, July 26, 2012.

31 Ibid.

32 "Religious Parties Protest Against Muslim Killings Today," *The News International*, June 14, 2013.

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Violent protests have also occurred in India, notably in Mumbai in August 2012 when two protesters were killed and 50 injured.[33] Indian police said the violence was prompted by inflammatory SMS (cellular phone text messaging) videos of violence in Myanmar—an example of how social media has dramatically raised awareness of events in the country.[34] Separately, on July 7, 2013, nine small bombs exploded at India's most significant Buddhist temple, Bodh Gaya in Bihar Province, injuring two.[35] Although no official statements have yet been made on the motive, Indian media speculated that the attack was revenge for events in Myanmar and cited past threats by Lashkar-i-Tayyiba (LeT) founder Hafiz Saeed to target India over its relations with Myanmar.[36]

Global Islamist Reaction

Events in Myanmar have also provided a rallying cry for Islamist groups worldwide. Some groups seem to have eagerly seized on the issue as it offers a clear narrative of Muslims being victimized by non-Muslims. This is particularly true of the Muslim Brotherhood which, at least until the recent military coup in Egypt, was eager to deflect attention from its growing image problems in Egypt and elsewhere. For example, the Freedom and Justice Party (FYP), the Muslim Brotherhood's Egyptian wing, has repeatedly seized on the issue, describing it as "genocide against Burmese Muslims" and the "barbaric cleansing of more than a million Muslims."[37] In April 2013, the FYP's Ezzedin al-Komi, chairman of the Human Rights Committee of Egypt's Shura Council, described Myanmar's actions as "crimes against humanity, gross injustice and brutal genocide."[38] Gamal Heshmat, another senior FJP leader, suggested a wider conspiracy: "Why do some parties—certain world powers—not consider the tragedy of Muslims as they scrutinize most minority issues in the Muslim world?"[39] In other countries, there have been calls for violence. In Lebanon, for example, a prominent Salafist was quoted as calling for attacks on Buddhists: "Every person who can get to a Buddhist should kill him because they are killing our people."[40]

In Western countries, the same emotive propaganda intended to foment anger and a narrative of Muslim victimhood is also visible. In September 2012, a grouping of British Islamists linked to the Cordoba Foundation, a London-based Muslim Brotherhood "front" group,[41] organized an event entitled "Burma Bloodbath," at the East London Mosque, the UK headquarters of Jamaat-i-Islami.[42] Anas al-Tikriti gave a speech describing Buddhists as being "far more capable of bloodshed and violence than we ever gave them credit for" and urging the audience to "remember Bosnia."[43] Another speaker, Ufuk Secgin, a representative of the Turkish Islamist group Milli Gorus, also compared the violence to Bosnia, saying: "Will we learn the names of the towns of Burma and Arakhan as we learned the names of the towns of Bosnia?"[44] Separately, Alyas Karmani, a Bradford-based preacher widely employed by the UK government through the counterterrorism "Prevent" program, gave an emotive talk in Bradford describing Rohingya Muslims "crying tears of blood" and "being clubbed to death."[45] He blamed the root cause of the strife on British colonialism and on Muslims "rejecting their core values" and "abandoning their *din* [religion]," closing his talk by calling on Allah to provide *nusra* (victory), although he was careful to urge his audience to work peacefully through democratic channels.[46]

Also in the United Kingdom, Hizb al-Tahrir held a protest outside the Bangladeshi High Commission in London in August 2012. The event was, however, mainly directed at Bangladesh's secular government, a long-standing opponent of Hizb al-Tahrir's UK branch, and the West. "The West doesn't care about Muslims—they care about business deals," read one placard. Hizb al-Tahrir's central office issued a notably more hard line statement in May 2013, advocating the reestablishment of the caliphate as this "will cause nations to quiver at the mere thought of harming a single Muslim under their rule."[47]

"It is clear that Myanmar's treatment of its Muslim minority is rapidly becoming a mobilizing issue for Islamist and jihadist groups—both regionally and globally."

Further along the Islamist spectrum, groups such as the one run by Anjem Choudary (his group is currently nameless after its previous incarnations were banned) also agitated against Myanmar. On April 5, 2013, the group protested outside the Myanmar Embassy in London (as well as the Sri Lankan one[48]) against the "continuous

33 "Inflammatory SMSs, Pictures Behind Rioting?" *Times of India*, August 13, 2012.

34 Ibid.

35 "Blasts at Indian Buddhist Shrines of Bodh Gaya in Bihar," BBC, July 7, 2013.

36 "Buddhist-Rohingya Conflict in Myanmar Spells Trouble for India," *Times of India*, July 8, 2013; "Terror Strikes Bodhgaya, Two Monks Injured," *Indian Express*, July 7, 2013.

37 "Freedom and Justice Party Demands Immediate Halt of Genocide Against Burmese Muslims," Ikhwanweb.com, August 5, 2012.

38 "Freedom and Justice Party Demands Immediate Halt of Genocide Against Burmese Muslims," Ikwanonline.info, August 15, 2012; "Egypt Parliament's Human Rights Committee Urges International Protection for Burma Muslims," Ikhwanweb.com, April 16, 2013.

39 "Gamal Heshmat: Muslims of Myanmar Victims of Discrimination, Racism and Genocide," fjponline.com, March 28, 2013.

40 "Syrian Islamists Set Sight on Myanmar," Now Lebanon, April 12, 2013.

41 In 2008, David Cameron, who led the British parliament at the time, called the Cordoba Foundation a "political front for the Muslim Brotherhood."

42 "Burma Bloodbath: Symposium on the Human Rights Abuses Inflicted on the Rohingya Muslims," available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=m57w86J5Oik.

43 Ibid.

44 "Ethnic Cleansing of a Forgotten People – New Coalition Supports Burma's Rohingya Muslims," Rohingya Minority Crisis Group, September 7, 2012.

45 Alyas Karmani, "Tears of Blood (Massacre of Muslims in Burma)," August 15, 2012, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=fo1g_Pa5TCY.

46 Ibid.

47 "The Fascist Burmese Regime Presents Birth Control of Rohingya Muslim Women as its latest Weapon of Ethnic Cleansing of Rakhine's Muslims," Hizb al-Tahrir, May 10, 2013.

48 There has been a similar uptick in Buddhist intolerance against Muslims in Sri Lanka, but at a much lower

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atrocities being committed against Muslim men, women and children…at the hands of Buddhist individuals and monks."[49] In Australia, Shaykh Shady Alsuleiman, a Salafist preacher at the controversial Lakemba Mosque, gave a sermon that "Muslims in Burma are being slaughtered."[50] In Myanmar, he continued, Muslim "blood was so cheap, it was like stepping on a cockroach" or "slaughtering a chicken."[51] He warned his audience, however, not to attack Buddhists in Australia as this "would not please Allah" and would "bring harm upon the Muslims."[52]

Conclusion

Although there is little evidence of Rohingya Muslims being involved in international terrorist groups, or any recent record of Rohingyas carrying out any sustained terrorist campaign within Myanmar, it is clear that Myanmar's treatment of its Muslim minority is rapidly becoming a mobilizing issue for Islamist and jihadist groups—both regionally and globally. Indeed, in the past year the issue has already generated violence overseas, including in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and even in normally peaceful Malaysia. It has also attracted the attention of Islamist and jihadist groups from Afghanistan to Australia to the United Kingdom—a notable development given that the Rohingya issue had rarely featured on the radar of such groups previously.

There are several reasons for this. Western engagement with Myanmar has raised the country's profile and enabled groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Hizb al-Tahrir to link Western engagement with anti-Muslim violence. In addition, many such groups have a vested interest in raising the profile of the violence in Myanmar. For some beleaguered organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Myanmar has been an opportunity to recast themselves as defenders of Islam. The conflict—which is typically presented by Islamists as a straightforward story of Buddhists victimizing innocent Muslims—is also much easier to market to core Islamist audiences than complex intra-Muslim conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Bahrain. In addition, anger at Myanmar (as evidenced by riots in Mumbai and the Indonesian detention center killings) has been repeatedly stoked by the deliberate circulation of forged or mislabeled photographs—as well as by Islamists' routine inflation of casualty figures.[53] Likewise, the characterization of the violence in Myanmar by a wide range of Islamist groups as a "slaughter," "massacre" and "genocide" has resonated in many Muslim communities, including among relatively more moderate groups.[54]

It is unlikely that Myanmar's treatment of the Rohingya will ever become a core issue for Islamist or jihadist groups globally. Nevertheless, one should not discount the power of a compelling and simple "good vs. evil" narrative—promoted by a broad range of Islamist groups and based on genuine instances of anti-Muslim discrimination and violence—to cause an uptick in Islamist violence and radicalization, within Myanmar, regionally, and further afield.

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level.

49 "Demonstration Outside the Sri Lankan and Burmese Embassies Tomorrow," anjem-choudary.com, April 2013.

50 "Burma: Where are the Muslims," August 3, 2012, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAw4xFG5xS4.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 For instance, some of the most widely shared photographs on social media sites which purport to show dead Rohingya actually show Indonesian victims of the 2004 tsunami.

54 In June 2013, for example, a Maryland representative of the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR), while making many accurate points about Myanmar's denial of equal rights to Rohingyas, himself described the killings of Muslims "as an ongoing genocide." See Saqib Ali, "In Burma, Let's Call it What It Is: Genocide," Council on American Islamic Relations, June 5, 2013.

Zaynab's Guardians: The Emergence of Shi`a Militias in Syria

By Christopher Anzalone

THE PUBLIC EMERGENCE of Twelver Shi`a[1] foreign fighter militias operating with Syrian government forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad, together with the recent public admission by Lebanese Hizb Allah that it is also operating alongside them, is the latest in the increasing sectarianization of Syria's civil war. Sectarianism has long been a tool used for social and political mobilization by a variety of actors, and has historically been employed as much in struggles within the same community as in struggles between different communities.[2] Historically, sectarianism has been driven by politics and competition over group identity, and has been a part of social processes to mobilize large numbers of people against other groups. This remains true today. As conflicts break down along sectarian or ethnic lines, identifiers (differentiating one group from another)—such as religious affiliation, nationality, or tribe—become increasingly salient. Mobilization frames, which draw upon cultural

1 Shi`a Islam is divided into several different groups: 1) "twelver" or Imami Shi`a who believe in a line of twelve divinely-guided religious and temporal leaders, the imams; 2) Ismaili Shi`a, who believe in the same line of imams as the "twelvers" up until the sixth, Ja`far al-Sadiq, who died in the eighth century CE; and 3) Zaydi Shi`a, whose beliefs lie between Sunni and Shi`a. This article focuses exclusively on Twelver Shi`a, hereafter referred to simply as "Shi`a." There is no evidence of pro-regime Ismaili or Zaydi Shi`a militias operating in Syria. Yemen is the only country in the Arab world with a significant Zaydi Shi`a population, and Syria's Ismaili Shi`a have actually participated in peaceful anti-government protests. See Omar Hossino, "Salamiyeh Bombings Strike the Heart of Syria's Peaceful Revolt," Syria Deeply, February 14, 2013.

2 See Ussama Makdisi's seminal study on the political and social utilization of sectarianism in Ottoman Lebanon: Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Marc Lynch, "The War for the Arab World," *Foreign Policy*, May 23, 2013; Geneive Abdo, "The New Sectarianism: The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Shi`a-Sunni Divide," Brookings Institution, 2013; Mariz Tadros, "Sectarianism and its Discontents in Post-Mubarak Egypt," *Middle East Report*, Summer 2011.

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idioms, are created and utilized to drive social mobilization.[3]

This article examines the gradual sectarianization of the Syrian civil war with a particular focus on the emergence, composition, mobilization frames and media campaigns of pro-Assad Shi`a militias.[4] Close attention is paid to the historical and cultural significance of the mobilization frames and idioms used to inspire support from a broad public, particularly Shi`a, for these groups' participation. Understanding these frames and their historical and cultural resonance, referred to as "frame resonance" in social movement theory literature,[5] is vital to comprehending the drivers of the mobilization and recruitment of Shi`a foreign fighters in Syria. It finds that these frames, in turn, are the central element at play in the formulation of a sectarian counter-narrative aimed at delegitimizing the Syrian opposition and Sunni rebel groups as well as attracting Shi`a foreign fighters from abroad to fight for al-Assad.

Gradual Sectarianization

Reports of Hizb Allah and other Shi`a militias' involvement in the war in Syria have led to new calls from influential Sunni religious leaders—such as the Qatar-based, Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Yusuf al-Qaradawi—for able-bodied Sunnis to travel to Syria to fight a military jihad against the Syrian government and its allies, chiefly Iran, Hizb Allah, and other Shi`a militias.[6] Prominent political actors and religious officials—including Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and the grand imam of al-Azhar seminary in Egypt, Ahmed al-Tayeb—have also become increasingly blunt in their rhetoric toward Shi`a, who they accuse of supporting sectarianism in Syria.[7] The creeping sectarianization of the Syrian conflict is a windfall for the Syrian Islamic Front, an umbrella organization for a number of Syrian Salafist rebel groups.[8]

Iran and its regional allies, including Hizb Allah and Shi`a militias in Syria, are actively trying to sway Shi`a worldwide toward viewing the conflict in black-and-white terms, portraying all Syrian rebel groups as being virulently anti-Shi`a and in league with the "neo-imperialists," namely the United States, European powers, and Israel.[9] These attempts are meant to frame the Syrian conflict as one having dire repercussions for Shi`a worldwide, a messaging tool that has historically proven both vital and successful in the recruitment of foreign fighters and "international brigades."[10] Reports of attacks on Shi`a in Syria, the destruction of some Shi`a mosques and shrines or the tombs inside them, and claims that major Shi`a shrines such as those of Sayyida Zaynab and Sakina bint Husayn have been damaged are mobilizing Shi`a around the world to support the al-Assad regime.[11] These events have been continuously highlighted and spun in the news coverage in the hopes of further inflaming the public opinion of Shi`a generally.[12] Such attacks or even reports of them are issues of concern for many Shi`a, not only those supportive of Iran and its allies, and this has been a boon for the latter, making it more likely that their mobilization frames will resonate with their intended audience.[13]

The ongoing production of pro-Shi`a militia artwork and media such as poetry recitations (*anashid*) set to song as well as the increasing numbers of recruits and volunteers to fight in Syria are evidence of the resonance of these groups' mobilization frames.[14] While focusing on the Shi`a fighters' "defense" of shrines such as Sayyida Zaynab's, militia media operations conceal these fighters' reported involvement in military operations in other parts of the country.

3 For a succinct discussion of mobilization frames and their role in social movement mobilization, see Quintan Wiktorowicz ed., *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004).

4 This article focuses primarily on Shi`a militias excluding Lebanese Hizb Allah.

5 Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000).

6 "Al-Qaradawi Calls Upon the Able-Bodied to Fight in Syria," Qaradawi.net, June 1, 2013; Griff Witte, "New Wave of Foreigners in Syrian Fight," *Washington Post*, June 21, 2013; "Sending of Egyptian Mujahideen to Syria Stirs Debate among Religious Scholars and Jihadi Organizations," *Azzaman*, May 31, 2013.

7 "Top Egypt Cleric Condemns 'Sectarian' Foes in Syria," Reuters, June 11, 2013; Lee Keath, "Hezbollah Entry in Syria Fans Shiite-Sunni Fires," Associated Press, June 7, 2013; Maggie Fick, "Egypt Brotherhood Backs Syria Jihad, Denounces Shi'ites," Reuters, June 14, 2013.

8 Aaron Y. Zelin and Charles Lister, "The Crowning of the Syrian Islamic Front," *Foreign Policy*, June 24, 2013.

9 Qays al-Khaz`ali, "Remarks of the Secretary General of the Ahl al-Haqq Islamic Resistance Movement on the Tenth Anniversary of its Founding," Asaib Ahl al-Haq, May 5, 2013.

10 David Malet, *Foreign Fighters: Transnational Identity in Civil Conflicts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); David Malet, "Why Foreign Fighters? Historical Perspectives and Solutions," Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2010.

11 Ruth Sherlock, "Syrian Shias Flee to Lebanon to Escape Sunni Militias," *Telegraph*, May 1, 2013; Patrick J. McDonnell and Nabih Bulos, "Syria's Shiites Offer Different Picture of War," *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 2013.

12 "Senior Shia Cleric Seyyed Naser al-Alawi Assassinated in Syria," AhlulBayt News Agency, April 14, 2013; "Holy Shrine of Hazrat [Holiness] Sakina (AS) Damaged by Terrorists in Syria," AhlulBayt News Agency, February 12, 2013; "The Islamic Resistance, `Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq, Condemns the Heinous Crime Against the Shrine of the Prophet's Companion Hujr bin `Adi, may God bless him, in Syria," Asaib Ahl al-Haq, May 3, 2013; "Hizb Allah: Where are the Syrian Opposition [Members] Who Said They Wanted to Defend the Holy Sites?" al-Manar, May 2, 2013; "After Threats to Shrine, Iraqi Shiite Fighters Prepare for Sectarian Strife at Home, in Syria," Associated Press, October 25, 2012.

13 Attacks on Shi`a Muslims and shrines have been picked up by other Shi`a news sources. See, for example, "Head of Hawza E Zainabia Martyred by Target Killing in Syria," Jafria News, April 16, 2013; "Desecration of Shrine of Hujr bin Adi al Kindi," May 3, 2013, available at www.coej.org/secretariat/statements/2639-hujr-bin-adi-al-kindi-statement.

14 Suadad al-Salhy, "Iraqi Shi'ites Flock to Assad's Side as Sectarian Split Widens," Reuters, June 19, 2013. Popular reciters of *anashid* and *latmiyat* (mourning recitations used in Shi`a ceremonies to commemorate the martyred imams and other Shi`a historical heroes and heroines) include Lebanese *munshid* (reciter) Ali Barakat and Iraqi *munshids* Ali Abu Kiyan al-Muwali and Muhammad Abu `Izra'il al-Karbala'i. Barakat has recorded a *latmiyya* entitled "In God's Protection," dedicated to the "martyr-guardians of Sayyida Zaynab," in which "the Awaited One's (Imam al-Mahdi) soldiers" are said to be "God's party (Hizb Allah)," who are congratulated for "achieving God's gardens [of Paradise]." Al-Muwali's *nashid* "O' Zaynab" has become a staple song used in many pro-Shi`a militia videos posted to video-sharing websites such as YouTube. Al-Karbala'i is identified as a "fighter [of Imam Husayn]" and he has recorded a martial anthem, based on a praise poem (*qasida*) by poet Muzaffar al-Jabari, dedicated to Liwa Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas.

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The Emergence and Composition of the Shi`a Militias

Media reports of Shi`a foreign fighters in Syria first surfaced in the autumn of 2012 and were largely based on interviews with militiamen participating in the fighting as well as Iraqi government officials.[15] Videos supporting Shi`a fighters began to appear on websites such as YouTube around the same time.[16] These included videos dedicated to those slain fighting "for Sayyida Zaynab," the daughter of Ali ibn Abi Talib, the first Shi`a imam and cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, as well as footage of funeral prayers for them inside the Sayyida Zaynab shrine.[17]

The fighters are primarily affiliated with Liwa Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas (hereafter the al-Abbas Brigade), a militia composed of fighters from a variety of nationalities including Iraqis, Syrians, Lebanese, Iraqi refugees in Syria, other Arabs, and Afghans.[18] Exact numbers of fighters are impossible to verify, but in an interview in late October 2012 an unnamed militiaman said that about 200 Iraqi recruits had traveled to Syria.[19] Most were drawn from groups that splintered from the mainstream Sadr Movement (*Tayyar al-Sadr*) led by Moqtada al-Sadr, as well as Iranian-supported militias originally formed to fight U.S. and coalition military forces in Iraq.[20] The latter include Asaib Ahl al-Haq (League of the Righteous/People of Truth) and Kataib Hizb Allah (Party of God Brigades).[21] The involvement of these groups can be verified through martyrdom statements, reports of funerals of Iraqi fighters slain in Syria, and reports on pro-militia websites.[22] Photographs of martyrs are often emblazoned with the emblems of the groups to which they belonged.[23] The exact breakdown of the affiliation of al-Abbas Brigade fighters is unclear, although a video commemorating some of its slain fighters purported to show each individual's group affiliation.[24]

"Recruitment of fighters has escalated in Iraq, with different Shi`a groups, including the Sadr Movement, forming committees to seek volunteers."

An unnamed official in the Badr Organization, a powerful Iraqi Shi`a political movement originally trained and supplied by Iran in the 1980s to fight Saddam Hussein, claimed that Shi`a militias were acquiring "new and advanced" heavy weapons for use in case the conflict escalates.[25] In an early October 2012 interview, Abu Hajer, an al-Abbas Brigade commander who had been living in Syria as an Iraqi refugee, said that the al-Abbas Brigade comprised 500 fighters.[26] According to interviews with unnamed Iraqi Shi`a leaders, the Syrian and Iranian governments have provided the militias with weapons, and the latter has organized the travel of Iraqi recruits.[27] Training camps for recruits are reportedly located in Iran, and fighters are aided by local contacts inside Syria.[28]

In a March 2013 interview with Russia Today, a state-funded satellite television network, Abu `Ajib, who is identified in media reports and militia media materials as the leader or secretary general of the al-Abbas Brigade, said that the militia was formed "months before" to defend Sayyida Zaynab's shrine from rebel attacks.[29] Brigade commander Abu Hajer has said that the brigade has carried out joint military operations against rebel groups when fighting erupted in the Sayyida Zaynab district near the shrine.[30] Although its leaders have said that they are not concerned with other internal fighting except with regards to the Sayyida Zaynab shrine and other Shi`a shrines, a brigade fighter, Abu Mujahid, said that the militia also carried out joint attacks with the Syrian military against bases of militias belonging to the Free Syrian Army (FSA) umbrella group.[31]

Photographs and artwork released on pro-brigade websites feature fighters in front of posters and portraits of Bashar and Hafiz al-Assad and other pro-al-Assad pieces of artwork, including a comparison of Hizb Allah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah and Bashar al-Assad, who are both shown reading the Qur'an with divine

15 Al-Salhy, "Iraqi Shi'ite Militants Fight for Syria's Assad."

16 This is based on the author's collection and cataloguing of videos and other media materials produced by or for these militias. It is possible, however, that earlier media uploads on websites such as YouTube were taken down by the uploader or the website administrators.

17 These videos, which were uploaded online by unknown individuals whose affiliation with the brigade seems likely but is unconfirmed, include: *The Prayer over the Martyrs in the Shrine of Sayyida Zaynab, Upon Her Be Peace*, September 2012; *Presentation to the Souls of the Martyrs of Sayyida Zaynab, Upon Her be Peace, and to the Souls of the Martyrs of al-Asad's Syria*, September 2012; and *Presentation to the Souls of the Martyrs of Sayyida Zaynab*, September 2012.

18 This is based on the militia's media materials, pro-militia media materials, and media reports, including: "Syria..National Defense Brigades' Specific Tasks," Russia Today, March 26, 2013; Figures 12 and 34 in "Visual References," Views from the Occident blog, June 23, 2013, available at http://occidentblog.wordpress.com/2013/06/24/visual-references/. Afghan Shi`a seminary students expelled from Iraq in the 1970s settled in the Sayyida Zaynab district where many of them restarted their studies at the Zaynabiyya Hawza. See Laurence Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious Networks in the Gulf* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

19 "After Threats to Shrine, Iraqi Shiite Fighters Prepare for Sectarian Strife at Home, in Syria."

20 Ibid. This is also based on martyrdom statements released by Iraqi Shi`a militias.

21 Ibid.

22 Representative statements include: "Statement: The Martyr, Ahmad Mahdi al-Shuwayli," Kataib Hizb Allah, April 15, 2013; "Statement: The Martyr Riza Khudayr al-Khalidi," Kataib Hizb Allah, May 6, 2013.

23 See Figures 13-15 in "Visual References."

24 *Martyrs of Liwa' Abu al-Fadl al-`Abbas*, June 2013. In addition to the Sadr Movement, Asaib Ahl al-Haq, and Kataib Hizb Allah, the video also purports to show martyred fighters from two other militias, the God's Soldiers Brigade and Brigade of the Force of Haydar, an honorific title meaning "lion" in Arabic used by Shi`a for Imam `Ali.

25 Ibid.

26 Al-Salhy, "Iraqi Shi'ite Militants Fight for Syria's Assad."

27 Yasir Ghazi and Tim Arango, "Iraqi Sects Join Battle in Syria on Both Sides," *New York Times*, October 27, 2012.

28 Mona Mahmood and Martin Chulov, "Syrian War Widens Sunni-Shia Schism as Foreign Jihadis Join Fight for Shrines," *Guardian*, June 4, 2013.

29 "Syria: National Defense Brigades' Specific Tasks," Russia Today, March 26, 2013.

30 Al-Salhy, "Iraqi Shi'ite Militants Fight for Syria's Assad."

31 Ibid.

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light emanating from the pages onto their faces.[32]

The al-Abbas Brigade is composed of several smaller fighting units named after figures from Islamic history who are particularly revered by Shi`a, such as the Twelve Imams recognized by Shi`a as the world's legitimate religious and temporal authorities.[33] These units include the Ali Akbar Brigade, Brigade of the Awaited One (named after an honorific title of the twelfth imam, Muhammad bin Hassan), al-Qasim Brigade, and the Brigade of Malik al-Ashtar.[34] Units likely affiliated with the al-Abbas Brigade include the Brigade of Zaynab's Protector and the Zulfiqar Brigade, which share members based on photographs released online on pro-brigade websites, primarily on Facebook.[35] At least one unit is named after an al-Abbas Brigade martyr, Ahmad Kayara, of which some photographs have been released on pro-brigade websites. Members of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and other Iraqi Shi`a groups—such as the Brigades of the Prince of Martyrs (Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada),the Imam Husayn Brigade, the God's Soldiers Brigade, and the Brigade of Ammar bin Yasir—are also reportedly active militarily inside Syria.[36] Full details, however, regarding the internal organization of the al-Abbas Brigade, its individual fighting units, and other Shi`a militias are unclear.

"By portraying all Syrian rebels as Salafists, the Shi`a militias and their supporters are essentially arguing that dialogue is hopeless."

Recruitment of fighters has escalated in Iraq, with different Shi`a groups, including the Sadr Movement, forming committees to seek volunteers.[37] Convoys of buses said to be carrying pilgrims have instead been filled with fighters and military supplies bound for the front in Syria.[38] In October 2012, a recruitment committee in Iraq's Diyala Province, the site of much sectarian strife between Iraqi Sunnis and Shi`a and a stronghold of the Islamic State of Iraq, a jihadist/insurgent umbrella group dominated by al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI), claimed that it had sent 70 fighters to Syria.[39]

Although the majority of fighters seems to be drawn from Shi`a communities, al-Abbas Brigade-affiliated sources, including leader Abu `Ajib, have claimed that the group's fighters comprise members of multiple groups including Sunni and Shi`a Muslims and Druze.[40] Determining the truth of these claims is not possible. The mobilization frames and historical and cultural repertoire from which the al-Abbas Brigade draws and the way in which they are deployed is distinctly Shi`a, which brings into question whether it can successfully recruit outside its Shi`a base.

Unity within the brigade has also reportedly come under increasing strain.[41] Emerging internal divisions show that while communal and sectarian identities can be used to initiate social and militant mobilization, they are not sufficient enough by themselves to ensure long-term unity.

Maintaining social movement cohesion and group unity in the longer term is difficult. Sectarian, ethnic, and other group identities are often not enough by themselves to maintain unity, and political and economic interests often come into play. Divergent political and economic interests can then trump shared sectarian and group identity. Localism is also often a factor in militant recruitment and the formulation of strategic goals and ideological positions.

Mobilizing Historical Memory and Popular Piety

The mobilization frames used by Shi`a actors in Syria play an integral role in their media operations, which are aimed at both attracting recruits as well as more non-military and more passive types of support from Shi`a communities globally. This includes the creation of pro-militia artwork, video montages, and other media as well as legitimizing, in the public sphere, the militias' involvement in Syria.

In formulating its mobilization frames, the al-Abbas Brigade and other Shi`a militias draw upon the deep reservoir of historical and cultural memory of Shi`a Islam. The heroic figure of Zaynab, the sister of Imam Husayn, and the other historical persons referenced by the brigade and its supporters evoke the tragedy of Karbala in 680 CE when Imam Husayn and many of his closest supporters and male family members were slain in battle against a larger force sent by the Umayyad Caliph Yazid I.[42] Brigade and pro-brigade media output contains numerous Shi`a historical and cultural symbols, including paintings of Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas[43]

32 See Figures 16-18 in "Visual References."

33 "News Report: Formation of a Shi'ite Brigade Composed of Iraqis and Lebanese for Defending the Shrine of Sayyida Zaynab South of Damascus," Russia Today, March 4, 2013.

34 See Figures 2-4 in "Visual References." Also see *Clashes of the Al-Qasim Brigade of Liwa' Abu al-Fadl al-`Abbas*, April 2013.

35 See Figure 5 and 6 in "Visual References." It is also possible that members of the latter two groups broke away from the al-Abbas Brigade after recent infighting.

36 "Formation [Unit] Calling Itself the 'Prince of Martyrs Brigades' Rejects Sectarianism and Calls for the Unity of the Iraqi People," al-Baghdadiyya News Agency, May 8, 2013; "Defection of the Secretary General of the Hizb Allah Brigades [in] Iraq and the Formation of the 'Prince of Martyrs [Brigade],'" *al-Masalah News*, April 14, 2013; Marcus George, "Iran's Revolutionary Guards Commander Says its Troops in Syria," Reuters, September 16, 2012; "Kazimiyya: The Funeral of a Retired Army Officer who was Killed One Month after His Participation [Began] Fighting in Syria," *al-Mustaqbal News*, July 10, 2013; *Clash of the Heroes of the `Ammar bin Yasir Brigade in the Countryside of Aleppo*, July 19, 2013; Figure 36 in "Visual References." Ammar bin Yasir was a key supporter and military commander of the first Shi`a imam, Ali ibn Abi Talib, who was martyred fighting for him at the Battle of Siffin in 657 CE.

37 Ghazi and Arango. Videos of trucks reportedly carrying Iraqi foreign fighter volunteers have also been posted to the internet.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 "News Report: Formation of a Shi'ite Brigade Composed of Iraqis and Lebanese for Defending the Shrine of Sayyida Zaynab South of Damascus." Also see Figure 1 in "Visual References."

41 Al-Salhy, "Iraqi Shi'ites Flock to Assad's Side as Sectarian Split Widens."

42 Their martyrdoms are commemorated annually during the first 10 days of the Islamic lunar month of Muharram, which culminates on the 10th day, called the Day of Ashura, when Imam Husayn himself was slain.

43 "Abu al-Fadl" is an honorific name meaning "father

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and Zaynab, Ashura artwork, and flags and standards (*`alam*) representing that of al-Abbas.[44] Popular religious songs based on poetry and videos produced by brigade supporters and possibly the brigade itself feature frequent mentions of Zaynab and other Shi`a holy figures such as al-Abbas.

Shi`a consider Zaynab to have been the individual most responsible for keeping Imam Husayn's message, and thus the purest form of Islam, alive after his death.[45] The pledge of loyalty, "*labbayk ya Zaynab*," ("we are at your service, O' Zaynab") and vow from fighters that "we sacrifice our souls for you, O' Zaynab" are frequent features in pro-brigade artwork and videos.[46] In a bid to counter anti-Assad activists, pro-brigade activists have even modified a slogan used previously by an anti-Assad Facebook campaign, "From [location], here is Damascus," followed by a declaration of loyalty to Zaynab.[47]

In the media operations of the al-Abbas Brigade and its supporters, Shi`a militiamen fighting in Syria are portrayed as "Zaynab's guardians" (*hurras Zaynab*) who are defending her shrine and, in turn, her honor, through self-sacrifice (*fida'*) from Salafist/Wahhabi hordes, which is how Syrian rebels are described in the discourse of the militias and their supporters; they are equated with historical villains such as the Umayyads.[48] Salafist creedal beliefs are virulently anti-Shi`a, and thus there is a long history of polemics between the two groups. By portraying all Syrian rebels as Salafists, the Shi`a militias and their supporters are essentially arguing that dialogue is hopeless. Brigade and pro-brigade media materials frequently include photographs of slain members and commanders from various rebel factions including the AQI-affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra.[49]

The al-Abbas Brigade takes its name from Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas, who was Imam Husayn's half-brother and standard bearer at Karbala.[50] Al-Abbas is the quintessential selfless hero of the Karbala story, and his sense of duty is emphasized in Shi`a accounts of his role as the defender of Husayn's family and his refusal to allow Husayn's standard to fall to the ground until al-Abbas could no longer stand.[51] A popular slogan in al-Abbas Brigade artwork is "*kuluna `Abbasak, ya Zaynab*" ("we are all your Abbas, O' Zaynab").[52]

The names of units within or affiliated with the brigade are taken from other heroes and symbols prominent in Shi`a Islam. These include units named after Imam `Ali's famous two-pronged sword, Zulfiqar, and the Brigade of Zaynab's Protector (Kafil Zaynab), the latter of which again emphasizes the defense of Zaynab's honor by defending her shrine.[53] The 12th Shi`a imam, Muhammad bin Hassan al-Mahdi, who is a messianic figure in Shi`a eschatology, also has a militia unit named after him, the Brigade of the Awaited Savior (Katibat al-Mahdi al-Muntazar).[54]

Other Shi`a heroes after whom Shi`a units fighting in Syria are named include Ali Akbar, the teenage son of Imam Husayn, and al-Qasim, his nephew and son of his predecessor, Imam Hassan, both of whom were martyred at Karbala.[55] Malik al-Ashtar and Ammar bin Yasir, two of the supporters of the Prophet Muhammad who became ardent followers of the first Shi`a imam, `Ali, also have fighting units named after them.[56]

For their part, Sunni rebel groups have drawn upon historical narratives and polemics to counter the information

of al-Fadl," the name of one of his sons.

44 See Figures 24-27 in "Visual References."

45 She is given the honorific *sayyida*, which in this context translates to "Lady."

46 See, for example, this video uploaded to YouTube and other video sharing websites: *Presentation O' Zaynab: Operations of Liwa' Abu al-Fadl al-`Abbas, Designated to Protect the Shrine of Sayyida Zaynab, Upon her be Peace*, December 2012. Another example is `Ali Abu Kiyan al-Muwali's song "O' Zaynab." One pro-brigade video montage included a part of a scene from a popular Arabic-language film about Karbala, *The Caravan of Pride*.

47 See Figures 20-23 in "Visual References." For background of the slogan's origins and use in a major Facebook campaign by opposition supporters, see "Here is Damascus," The Syrian, May 29, 2013, available at www.english.the-syrian.com/2013/05/29/here-is-damascus.

48 See Figures 7, 8, 30, and 31 in "Visual References." Also see *Letter from Hezbollah to the Wahhabis*, June 2013, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=vstAoKzA7nA. One internet poster from a pro-brigade website compared Syrian rebels, by association with rebel commander-turned-symbolic cannibal Abu Sakkar, with Hind bint `Utba, one of the Prophet Muhammad's most virulent enemies before his conquest of Mecca in 630 CE. For Abu Sakkar's reported cannibalism, see Drishya Nair, "Syria's Cannibal Commander Abu Sakkar: Why I Ate My Enemy's Heart," *International Business Times*, May 15, 2013. For the poster, see Figure 35 in "Visual References."

49 See Figures 28-30 in "Visual References."

50 An alternative name for the brigade is Katibat Liwa Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas (Brigade of the Standard of Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas), which emphasizes his role as Imam Husayn's standard bearer at Karbala. See Figure 19 in "Visual References."

51 Sayyid Najmulhasan Karrarvi, *Biography of Hazrat Abbas* (Karachi: Peermahomed Ebrahim Trust, 1974), particularly pp. 49-51 and 78-90. Also see the film *Karbala: When the Skies Wept Blood*.

52 See Figure 9 in "Visual References."

53 "'Zulfiqar Brigade,' Second Militia for the Defense of the Shrine of Sayyida Zaynab!" Orient News, June 9, 2013; *'Zulfiqar Brigade'...Formation of a New Shi'i [Militia]*, June 9, 2013, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=WH7O4hm-P8A. As with many Islamic historical figures and symbols, Zulfiqar is a contested symbol and some anti-Assad Syrian rebel groups have also taken it as part of their name. See *Statement on the Formation of the Zulfiqar Brigade of the Brigade of the Martyrs of Rusafa following the Military Revolutionary Council [in] Deir al-Zur*, Zulfiqar Brigade, June 2013; *With God's Help, the Formation of the Zulfiqar Brigade in the Free City of Jarablus, following the `Amr bin al-`As Brigade*, Zulfiqar Brigade, September 2012; *Zulfiqar Brigade of Colonel Muhammad Ziyad Qasimu*, Zulfiqar Brigade, April 2013; *Shield of Zulfiqar Brigade Responding to the Hordes of al-Asad in the Towns of Karnaz and the Countryside of Hama*, Shield of Zulfiqar Brigade, February 2013.

54 See Figure 3 in "Visual References." Shi`a Muslims believe that the 12th imam, Muhammad bin Hassan, is the last imam in a line of divinely-appointed successors to the Prophet Muhammad who possess both religious and temporal authority over the Muslim community.

55 *Clashes of the Qasim Brigade of Liwa' Abu al-Fadl al-`Abbas*, April 2013, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZoSKvyW4KI. See Figure 2 in "Visual References." Al-Qasim is known among Shi`a as the "Bridegroom of Karbala" because it is said he was married on the morning of the day he was martyred at Karbala. This account first appears, it seems, in the 16th century, Persian-language elegiac martyrology of Husayn Va`iz Kashifi, *Garden of the Martyrs*. See Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); David Pinault, *Horse of Karbala: Muslim Devotional Life in India* (New York: Palgrave, 2001). It has been published numerous times in various languages. See Husayn Va`iz Kashifi, *Garden of the Martyrs* (Qum: Daftar-i Nashr-i Navid-i Islam, 2000 or 2001).

56 See Figure 4 in "Visual References." Malik was appointed governor of Egypt. Malik was poisoned while traveling to Egypt on the orders of Ali's chief rival for leadership of the Muslim state, Mu`awiya ibn Sufyan, who is reviled by Shi`a but considered one of the Prophet Muhammad's companions by Sunnis.

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operations and messaging of the al-Abbas Brigade, Hizb Allah, and other Shi`a actors in Syria. Rebel discourses refer to them and sometimes Shi`a generally as being guilty of polytheism (*shirk*) and unbelief (*kufr*) because of their belief in the line of the Twelve Imams. They also refer to Shi`a as the "fire worshippers" or Zoroastrians since they allege that Shi`a Islam is nothing more than an offshoot of pre-Islamic Iranian religions. Rebel videos showing military operations against the brigade often feature captured Shi`a cultural artifacts such as paintings of the imams and Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas, Shi`a religious writings and multimedia, and tablets of clay used by Shi`a during prayer.[57]

Conclusion

Information on Shi`a militias operating in Syria is limited, despite the relative wealth of information on pro- and quasi-militia websites. In particular, information on the individual motivations of recruits remains unknown due to the paucity of available primary sources.[58] Even when such sources are available, the declared intentions of fighters need to be evaluated carefully since these declarations are not necessarily truthful or accurate.[59] Martyr biographies are also usually highly and posthumously hagiographical in their depiction of the deceased and their motivations.[60]

The rise of Shi`a militias and their political backers in Iran and Iraq also present a potential challenge to the authority of Shi`a *maraji` al-taqlid* (Shi`a religious authorities), such as Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani in Iraq. Although the most recognized senior Shi`a jurists, such as al-Sistani, have not yet addressed the appearance of these militias or related questions regarding the religious legitimacy of their claims to be engaged in military jihad, it is important not to exaggerate these jurists' ability to guide the public's behavior, even that of individuals who ostensibly follow their religious opinions and rulings. In 2006, for example, following the first bombing of the al-Askari Mosque in the Iraqi city of Samarra, where two of the Twelve Imams are buried, Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani issued several statements calling for patience and forbidding acts of revenge and retaliatory violence, explicitly mentioning sectarian attacks against Sunnis.[61] He and Najaf's three other resident grand ayatollahs were ultimately trumped by powerful Iraqi Shi`a political actors who, together with Iraqi and foreign Sunni militants, led Iraq down the path of sectarian conflict.

Although the influence of Shi`a religious leaders is significant, it is not absolute, and recent history has shown that in the midst of sectarian violence they are often overshadowed by virulent sectarian political voices.

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57 *The Free [Syrian] Army Raids One of the Headquarters of Liwa' Abu al-Fadl al-`Abbas in the Damascus Countryside*, April 2013.

58 Christopher Anzalone, "A Few Notes on Shi'ism in Syria and the Emergence of a Pro-Asad Shi'i Militia, Liwa' Abu'l Fadl al-`Abbas," al-Wasat blog, May 22, 2013.

59 Thomas Hegghammer, "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting," *American Political Science Review* 107:1 (2013).

60 This is based on the author's analysis of contemporary written and audiovisual Sunni and Shi`a martyrologies.

61 `Ali al-Sistani, statements, February 2006 and February 2007.

Al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb's Tunisia Strategy

By Aaron Y. Zelin, Daveed Gartenstein-Ross & Andrew Lebovich

DURING THE LAST two years, Salafist activity has escalated in Tunisia. Much of this activity—primarily *da`wa* (religious outreach) designed to expand the Salafist movement—has taken place under the auspices of Ansar al-Shari`a in Tunisia (AST), headed by veteran jihadist Saifullah bin Hassine (also known as Abu Iyadh al-Tunisi).[1] A series of security incidents in and around Tunisia, however, have been attributed to al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and more recently to an opaque group known as the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade.[2] Regional security officials have described the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade as an attempt to establish a Tunisian jihadist group linked to AQIM, one that purportedly combines local recruits from western Tunisia's Kasserine area and some members of AST under the guidance and leadership

1 Abu Iyadh was part of the United Kingdom's "Londonistan" scene in the 1990s, where he became associated with jihadist figures such as Hani al-Siba`i and Abu Qatada al-Filistini, even being described as Abu Qatada's "disciple" on some jihadist forums. See "Tunisian Salafi Ansar al-Shari'ah Gaining Hard-line Jihadist Support," BBC Monitoring, May 24, 2012; Fabio Merone, "Salafism in Tunisia: An Interview with a Member of Ansar al-Shari`a," *Jadaliyya*, April 11, 2013. He also became associated with Algeria's Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) during this period and facilitated Tunisians' travel to Algeria so they could receive militant training with the GSPC. In Afghanistan, he co-founded the Tunisian Combatant Group, which the United Nations designated an al-Qa`ida-affiliated terrorist organization in 2002. For details, see "QE.T.90.02. Tunisian Combatant Group," UN Security Council, April 7, 2011; Aaron Y. Zelin, "Missionary at Home, Jihadist Abroad: A Profile of Tunisia's Abu Ayyad the Amir of Ansar al-Shari`a," *Militant Leadership Monitor* 3:4 (2012); Lorenzo Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe: The New Battleground of International Jihad* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005).

2 Uqba ibn Nafi was a seventh century Arab general under the Umayyad Caliphate who founded the Tunisian city of Qayrawan. Interestingly, the Uqba ibn Nafi mosque in Qayrawan, a city renowned for its longstanding tradition of Islamic scholarship, has become a bastion of Salafist preaching since 2011. See "Tunisie – Mohamed Hassen à la Mosquée Okba Ibn Nafaâ: Une foule, survoltée, réclame la Chariâa (vidéo)," *Business News* [Tunis], May 3, 2013.

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of figures reputedly close to AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel (also known as Abu Mus`ab al-Wadud).[3] Regional security officials, therefore, perceive the incidents on Tunisia's border with Algeria beginning in late April 2013 as highlighting AQIM's increased focus on Tunisia.

This article analyzes how AQIM, viewing events in Tunisia through its strategic lens, has responded to that country's revolution. It finds that AQIM has tried to insert itself into AST's relationship with the Tunisian state. AQIM has urged AST to be patient to prevent the Tunisian government from cracking down on its activities. At the same time, AQIM's rhetoric toward the Tunisian state has become sharper, opening the possibility of an increase in AQIM-related violence in Tunisia.

AQIM's Strategic Outlook

Understanding AQIM's policies toward Tunisia requires an awareness of the group's perceptions of the changes brought by the Arab uprisings, and how these changes in turn influence its strategy toward the region. Salafi-jihadi thinkers and strategists who are influential to AQIM quickly reached consensus about what the Arab uprisings meant, formulating their ideas about the revolutionary events even while Hosni Mubarak's regime in Egypt drew its final breaths. They agreed that the changes gripping the region were positive, primarily because they created unprecedented opportunities to undertake *da`wa*.[4] At the same time, the movement would not be satisfied constraining itself to *da`wa*, and this early theoretical work emphasized a phased approach wherein Salafi-jihadis—even while undertaking *da`wa* peacefully, in ways they could not under the old regimes—would prepare to later engage in violence.[5]

Tunisia-based researcher Monica Marks identified three major divisions of Salafism within Tunisia: *Salafiyya `Almiyya* (usually translated as scientific Salafism, but which Marks believes is better understood as scripturalist Salafism), political Salafism, and *Salafiyya Jihadiyya* (Salafi-jihadism).[6] To those who can be categorized as *Salafiyya `Almiyya*, democracy is "a tempting, but ultimately dead-end street," and instead of engaging in party politics they choose "apolitical lives of quietist piety."[7] Political Salafists have much in common with *Salafiyya `Almiyya*, but believe participation in democratic politics is justified despite its flaws because it "could serve as a vehicle to attain a more caliphate-like, Shari`a-based polity."[8] Those who can be considered *Salafiyya Jihadiyya* reject both democratic participation and also the quietism of *Salafiyya `Almiyya*.

Although AST has distanced itself from violence at this time, it has shown a devotion to Salafi-jihadi ideology, a fact that can be seen from both their own explanations and threats,[9] as well as the significant and long-standing connections that leaders and key members of the organization have to transnational jihadists.[10] Indeed, because of these factors, AST has won the praise of key leaders and intellectuals in the Salafi-jihadi movement.[11]

Its current activities within Tunisia are mostly concentrated on *da`wa*, which has allowed the movement to grow in size and give it influence beyond its relatively small numbers.[12]

The bulk of the jihadist activities in which the group might be involved have been focused abroad, such as promoting the flow of foreign fighters to Syria, although the group has also been accused of orchestrating attacks on perceived cultural opponents within Tunisia.[13] Although the extent of AST's

3 See, for example, Benjamin Roger, "Tunisie: sur la trace des djihadistes de mont Chaambi," *Jeune Afrique*, May 7, 2013; Mourad Sellami, "Les précisions du ministre de l'Intérieur tunisien," *El Watan* [Algiers], December 22, 2012; "Tunisie-Alqaida-Aqmi: Groupes armés, Larayedh sonne l'alert," Tunis Afrique Presse, December 21, 2012; Andrew Lebovich, "Confronting Tunisia's Jihadists," *Foreign Policy*, May 16, 2013.

4 See Ayman al-Zawahiri, "And be Neither Weakened nor Saddened," al-Sahab, August 15, 2011; Atiyatallah `Abd al-Rahman, "The People's Revolt...The Fall of Corrupt Arab Regimes...The Demolition of the Idol of Stability...and the New Beginning," distributed by the Global Islamic Media Front, February 16, 2011. For an in-depth discussion of early Salafi-jihadi perceptions of the Arab uprisings, see Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Tara Vassefi, "Perceptions of the 'Arab Spring' Within the Salafi-Jihadi Movement," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35:12 (2012).

5 Prominent Mauritanian ideologue Abu al-Mundhir al-Shinqiti, who is well known for his belief in the necessity of violence, emphasized a phased approach by speaking to the need for leniency while *da`wa* is predominant. Referring specifically to Tunisia, he said that "present circumstances...require that the people of monotheism concentrate on the aspect of preaching," due to ignorance of Islam caused by Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's fallen regime. See Abu al-Mundhir al-Shinqiti, "Answers to Questions from Our Tunisian Brothers," Minbar al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, December 15, 2011. AST leaders have also articulated a phased approach. Hassan Ben Brik, who heads AST's *da`wa* committee, has described jihad as "certainly part of our political project," but said that AST has "no interest currently in embarking on violent initiatives, or acts of terrorism." See Sergio Galasso, "Intervista ad Hassan Ben Brik: 'Non crediamo nella democrazia, ma senza appoggio del popolo niente jihad,'" *Limes*, October 11, 2012. Another young AST leader told an Italian researcher that AST has not "eliminated the idea of jihad from our philosophy," but that the group is not currently engaged in revolutionary violence because it is focused on *da`wa*. See Merone, "Salafism in Tunisia."

6 Monica Marks, "Youth Politics and Tunisian Salafism: Understanding the Jihadi Current," *Mediterranean Politics* 18:1 (2013). This tripartite division is consistent with the strains of Tunisian Salafism identified by other researchers. See Stefano M. Torelli, Fabio Merone & Francesco Cavatorta, "Salafism in Tunisia: Challenges and Opportunities for Democratization," *Middle East Policy* 19:4 (2012).

7 Marks, "Youth Politics and Tunisian Salafism: Understanding the Jihadi Current."

8 Ibid.

9 "Abu Iyadh Threatens to 'Afghanise' Tunisia in Most Serious Salafist Menace," Middle East Online, May 13, 2013; Aaron Zelin, "Who's Who in Tunisia's Salafi-Jihadi Community: A Look at Key Leaders of Ansar al-Shari`a in Tunisia," *Militant Leadership Monitor*, April 2013.

10 Abu Iyadh has said that AST "shared in the same *manhaj*," or religious methodology, as al-Qa`ida. See Zelin, "Missionary at Home, Jihadist Abroad." For AST leaders' explanations of their devotion to jihadist violence, see Galasso, "Intervista ad Hassan Ben Brik"; Merone, "Salafism in Tunisia."

11 For praise of AST by key Salafi-jihadi figures, see "Journalistic Encounter with the Director of Al-Andalus Media Foundation," al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb, April 18, 2013; "Web: Jihadists Send Mixed Messages to Tunisia's Salafis," BBC Monitoring, November 8, 2012.

12 Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, *Ansar al-Shari`a Tunisia's Long Game: Dawa, Hisba and Jihad* (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism-The Hague, 2013).

13 Thomas Joscelyn, "Tunisian 'Martyrs' Celebrated by Ansar al Sharia," *The Long War Journal*, March 13, 2013; Ahmed Maher, "Tunisia's Radical Divide over Salafi Agenda," BBC, June 6, 2013; Thomas A. Bass, "How Tunisia is Turning Into a Salafist Battleground," *The Atlantic*, June 20, 2013. Aaron Y. Zelin has kept a comprehensive database of martyrdom announcements issued by rebel forces in Syria that demonstrates both the presence of AST fighters and also the fact that AST subsequently

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relationship with AQIM is unknown, AQIM leaders have repeatedly offered advice to the group on how to proceed in Tunisia.

Advising Tunisians, Ennahda, and AST

In its public statements, AQIM has attempted to act as a wise outsider providing counsel on the best course for Tunisia's future—offering advice to Ennahda and AST. Ennahda, Tunisia's Islamist political party, contested democratic elections after the fall of the Zine El Abidine Ben Ali government and won a majority of seats. Yet Ennahda's more moderate policies have placed it at odds with more hard line groups such as AST and other Salafists.

AQIM has a powerful message in the form of its warnings that Tunisians' hard-won victory over the former regime could be stolen from them. This message especially resonates with Tunisians who are already sympathetic to AQIM's worldview.

The first statement AQIM released on the Tunisian revolution came on January 13, 2011, when the group's *amir*, Abdelmalek Droukdel, justified the uprising by painting the regime as "exceeding its boundaries in fighting Islam like no other."[14] He told Tunisians that their movement must be broad and led by the wisdom of the *ulama*.[15] At the same time, he offered Tunisians the opportunity to train with AQIM for the final battle against the Jews and Christians, saying that the overthrow of the local regime was but one stage in a broader war.[16] He framed Tunisians' struggle as part of AQIM's larger fight: "Your mujahidin brothers are with you, your problem is our problem, and your happening is ours."[17]

A couple of weeks later, AQIM released another statement highlighting the opportunities and dangers of the post-Ben Ali era.[18] AQIM advised Tunisians "to take advantage of this historical opportunity to spread the *manhaj* (methodology) of *tawhid* (monotheism) and jihad."[19] At the same time, Tunisians must "prepare and be ready as the days are pregnant and the Crusade war against Islam and Muslims remains utmost intense."[20] This statement is consistent with the theoretical work produced by Salafi-jihadi thinkers counseling an initial stage of preaching that would culminate in violence when the movement is ready (or when its hand is forced).

AQIM did not release any new statements on Tunisia until October 2012. The return of its public rhetoric coincided with AST's ascendance, as well as Tunisia's leading Islamist party, Ennahda, distancing itself from Salafist movements following the September 2012 attack on the U.S. Embassy in Tunis.[21] The rhetorical and later street confrontation between Tunisian security services and AST gave AQIM the opportunity to attempt to insert itself as an arbiter among different Islamist movements. Later, AQIM offered support and advice to AST, as a look at a series of AQIM's subsequent statements demonstrates.

In October 2012, AQIM took a soft tone in a public address, noting that it was only giving advice so as not to "fall in the traps of the enemies of Islam."[22] The message to Ennahda was that while there might be differences in tactics, both groups want the same end result: implementation of Shari`a.[23] Therefore, AQIM said that it is better to work together than to engage in intra-Islamist infighting, which would only help those with a secular or liberal agenda.[24] AQIM warned against working with the United States, and also France and the old regime—an allusion to the upstart political party Nida' Tunis (the Tunisian Call), which has a number of leaders from the former regime.[25] AQIM stated that the "Islamic movement" should focus on spreading its message through *da`wa* while avoiding *takfir* (excommunication).[26]

In a March 2013 statement, AQIM further emphasized the importance of *da`wa* by exhorting Tunisians to stay in their own country rather than joining the jihad abroad.[27] Without a critical mass of Salafi-jihadis at home, AQIM warned, Tunisia would be ceded to secularists who "spread corruption."[28]

Yet the tone of AQIM's statements shifted less than two months later, as a confrontation heated up with Ennahda and the Tunisian state on one side, and AQIM and AST on the other.[29] At the time, Tunisia was undertaking military operations against the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade on its border with Algeria, and there were also low-level clashes in Tunisian cities due to the state's cancellation of AST's annual conference in May 2013. AQIM was evolving to a more hostile stance toward Ennahda—one that mirrors the increasing anger of Salafists and Salafi-jihadis toward Ennahda, and the worsening AST-Ennahda relationship.

For the first time, AQIM explicitly criticized the Islamist Ennahda party for its perceived wavering on the issue of Shari`a, and for selling democracy as legitimate under Islam. "Don't be deceived by the people who call to democracy by decorating it under the name of the truth and give it a religious garment," the statement implored.[30] Therefore, AQIM advised Tunisians to shield themselves from these provocations by joining "your sincere preachers of Ansar al-Shari`a, who stood next to you."[31] Yet while these statements were hostile toward Ennahda, Mauritanian AQIM member Abu Yahya al-Shinqiti also counseled AST to be

issued laudatory announcements when they were killed.

14 Abu Mus`ab al-Wadud, "In Support of the Intifadah of our People in Tunisia," al-Andalus Media, January 13, 2011.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 "To Our People in Tunisia: The Tyrant has Fled but the Infidel and Tyrannical System Remains," al-Andalus Media, January 28, 2011.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Camille Tawil, "Ennahda Reconsiders Ties With Tunisian Salafist Groups," *al-Hayat*, May 29, 2013.

22 "To the Wise Men of the Islamist Movement in Tunisia," al-Andalus Media, October 22, 2012.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 "Call to the Youth of Islam: To Those Who Aspire to Hijrah in the Way of God in the Islamic Maghreb in General and Tunisia in Particular," al-Andalus Media, March 17, 2013.

28 Ibid.

29 Abu Yahya al-Shinqiti, "O People of Tunisia of al-Qayrawan Be Supporters of Shari`a al-Rahman," al-Andalus Media, May 18, 2013; Shaykh Ahmad Abu `Abd al-Ilah, "Letter of Advice to Ennahda in Tunisia of al-Qayrawan," al-Andalus Media, May 21, 2013.

30 Al-Ilah.

31 Ibid.

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cautious of the Tunisian government's "provocations," and to demonstrate "patience and wisdom" rather than being dragged into "random actions."[32] AQIM's public stance has been to counsel AST not to escalate its conflict with the government, so that it can maintain its ability to undertake *da`wa* openly. At the same time, AQIM serves as an ominous presence in the background, a dark cloud hanging over Tunisian society.

AQIM Operations in Tunisia

When the Algeria-based Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) became AQIM in 2007, one goal behind its founding was to integrate into one structure the various jihadist groups in North Africa, including the Tunisian Combatant Group (TCG). The TCG's involvement with the GSPC/AQIM, however, was limited for a number of years. Early Tunisian global jihadist activity, such as the arrangement for two Belgian-Tunisians to kill Afghan mujahidin commander Ahmad Shah Massoud in 2001, involved direct links to al-Qa`ida's core organization rather than to GSPC/AQIM.[33] The GSPC and later AQIM were regarded as largely focused on Algeria.

"AQIM's public stance is to counsel AST not to escalate its conflict with the government, so that it can maintain its ability to undertake da`wa openly. At the same time, AQIM serves as an ominous presence in the background, a dark cloud hanging over Tunisian society."

This is not to say that Tunisian jihadists were not involved with their Algerian counterparts during this period. TCG co-founder Tarek Maaroufi worked with GSPC networks in Europe, Tunisians trained in GSPC/AQIM camps, and some Tunisiasn radicals were captured or killed by Algerian security services.[34] Still, this cooperation appears limited.

Yet with the Arab uprisings and the fall of Ben Ali, AQIM's reported presence in Tunisia became more visible. In May 2011, a gunfight that killed two Tunisian security force members (including a colonel) broke out in the southern Tunisian town of Rouhia after security forces discovered men trying to transport weapons.[35] The militants, reportedly AQIM members, included Algerians, Libyans, and Tunisians, two of whom were, according to Tunisian authorities, part of a group of fighters who tried to infiltrate and recruit fighters in Tunisia in 2006 and 2007 known as the Suleiman Group.[36] The next year, in Bir Ali Ben Khalifa, fighting between suspected militants and security forces broke out after authorities tried to stop arms smugglers.[37] The clashes resulted in the deaths of two militants and the recovery of 34 automatic weapons and nearly $55,000 in cash.[38] According to then-Tunisian Interior Minister (now prime minister) Ali Laarayedh, some of the 12 men arrested after the incident had links to AQIM.[39]

"It is likely that the tenor of the relationship between AST and the Ennahda-led government will continue to deteriorate, as will the relationship between AQIM and the Tunisian state."

During this period, according to Algerian officials, the flow of arms increased through and within Tunisia (from both Libya and Algeria), a trend that became noticeable in the Algerian provinces of El Oued and Tebessa, which border Tunisia, as well as in close inland provinces like Khenchela and Bouira.[40]

In December 2012, the situation escalated with the emergence of what Tunisian officials termed AQIM's attempt to set up a branch in Tunisia, the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade.[41] Following security incidents that month in Kasserine and the arrests of 16 militants reputedly linked to AQIM, Laarayedh publicly identified the group, saying that it was led by Algerians close to AQIM leader

32 Al-Shinqiti, "O People of Tunisia of al-Qayrawan Be Supporters of Shari`a al-Rahman."

33 Benjamin Roger, "Tunisie: Abou Iyadh, au nez et à la barbe des autorités," *Jeune Afrique*, September 18, 2012.

34 For information on Maaroufi, see "The United States and Italy Designate Twenty-Five New Financiers of Terror," U.S. Treasury Department, August 29, 2002; Christophe Dubois and Frédéric Vézard, "Le Tunisien d'Al-Qaïda fréquentait un cybercafé de Menton," *Le Parisien*, October 22, 2002. For information on Tunisians training in GSPC/AQIM camps, see Anneli Botha, "Terrorism in the Maghreb: The Transnationalisation of Domestic Terrorism," Institute for Security Studies, July 2008. For information on Tunisians killed or captured by Algerian authorities, see Mounir B., "Six terroristes tunisiens arrêtés à Annaba," *Le Quotidien d'Oran*, April 17, 2005.

35 Frida Dahmani, "Tunisie: échanges de tir meurtriers entre militaires et membres présumés d'Aqmi," *Jeune Afrique*, May 18, 2011.

36 Contemporary reporting identified these two as Sofiane Ben Amor and Abdelwaheb Hmaied. See Frida Dahmani, "Tunisie: échanges de tir meurtriers entre militaires et membres présumés d'Aqmi," *Jeune Afrique*, May 18, 2011. The Suleiman Group was built around several jihadists, led by a former Tunisian national guardsman named Lassad Sassi. Sassi had trained with the GSPC in Algeria, then slipped into Tunisia and recruited and trained as many as 40 men before the Suleiman Group was broken up by Tunisian security forces in early 2007. The group, however, had difficulties with funding and equipment, and later analysis has theorized that the group posed somewhat less of a threat to Tunisian security than initial reporting suggested. See, for example, Alison Pargeter, "The Suleiman Affair: Radicalism and Jihad in Tunisia," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 23:1 (2011).

37 "Tunisie: violences et défi salafiste," International Crisis Group, February 13, 2013.

38 Zohra Abid, "Tunisie. La groupe de Bir Ali Ben Khalifa est lié à Al Qaïda," *Kapitalis*, February 13, 2012.

39 Ibid.

40 For one notable incident involving an arms convoy that fled from Algeria into Tunisia, see Georges Malbrunot, "Un mystérieux convoi armé stoppé en Tunisie," *Le Figaro*, September 23, 2011. Also see "À Bir El Ater, les contrebandiers préfèrent le trafic d'armes," *El Watan*, October 7, 2011.

41 Mourad Sellami, "Cellule d'Al Qaîda démantelée aux frontières: Les precisions du ministre de l'intérieur tunisien," *El Watan*, December 22, 2012.

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Abdelmalek Droukdel.[42] Laarayedh added that the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade was composed largely of recruits from the region of Kasserine, which abuts Algeria, and that the group's goal was to provide initial training before sending fighters along to "real" AQIM camps in Algeria or Libya.[43]

After several months searching for militants in the region of Jebel Chaambi, Tunisia's highest mountain, and further north toward El Kef, Tunisian security forces struck a homemade mine on the mountain on April 29, 2013.[44] Between then and early June, at least 20 Tunisian soldiers were wounded, some seriously, and two killed by improvised explosive devices on the mountain.[45] Again, Tunisian officials identified those behind the bombs as the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade, which they alleged included fighters who had spent time in northern Mali.[46] While Tunisian officials have claimed that the group has left the mountain, Algerian security forces have stepped up surveillance and border security operations over the last two months.[47] According to *El Watan*, Algerian forces have even conducted limited counterterrorism operations in Tunisian territory.[48]

Interestingly, at a time when Tunisian security services were hunting fighters in Jebel Chaambi and El Kef, militant-linked violence in the regions of Algeria bordering Tunisia appears to have increased. While it is unclear to what extent this violence may have been connected to developments in Tunisia or to the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade, at least one incident in February 2013—a coordinated assault on an Algerian army base at Khenchela—was reportedly conducted by a group of fighters bearing a striking resemblance to the descriptions of the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade.[49] This could bolster suggestions that the group is using Tunisia largely for recruitment and training, while focusing on combat operations elsewhere, such as in Algeria or Mali.

While Tunisian officials have charged that members of AST may have been involved in the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade and the incidents around Jebel Chaambi, and that AST leader Abu Iyadh al-Tunisi has visited the mountain, this information is impossible to confirm and could be related to the tensions between the Ennahda-led government and AST.[50]

Conclusion

It is likely that the tenor of the relationship between AST and the Ennahda-led government will continue to deteriorate, as will the relationship between AQIM and the Tunisian state. AST has something to lose, however, if it moves toward direct confrontation with the state: the group has been able to provide social services to areas neglected by the government, and has positioned itself as a leading voice opposed to a system widely seen as failing. Although AST remains numerically small, it enjoys influence beyond its numbers. Going to war with the state would mean sacrificing its ability to engage in *da`wa* openly.[51]

Thus, while it is not clear that this is the result of coordination between the two groups, AQIM has served as a safety valve for AST. It has urged AST to deescalate its confrontations with the state, even while AQIM itself has adopted an increasingly harsh tone toward the Tunisian government and appears to be escalating its activities in the Algeria-Tunisia border region.[52]

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42 Dorra Megdiche Meziou, "Al Qaïda, menace-t-elle vraiment la Tunisie?" *Business News*, December 21, 2012.

43 Ibid.; Roger, "Tunisie: sur la trace des djihadistes du mont Chaambi." Other reports indicated the presence of purported training camps in Tunisia as early as last fall. See Malik Aït-Aoudia, "Tunisie: qui protège les camps jihadistes?" *Marianne*, October 23, 2012.

44 "Fifth Mine Explodes in Mount Chaambi, No Victims," Tunis Afrique Press, May 20, 2013.

45 Antoine Lambroschini, "Jihadists Hunted in Tunisia 'Former Mali Fighters,'" Agence France-Presse, May 8, 2013.

46 Ibid.

47 Amira Masrour, "Government Says Chaambi Attacks Planted by Actors Outside the Mountain," Tunisia Live, June 7, 2013; "Tunisie – l'armée algérienne soupçonne les terroristes de se déplacer sous la couverture de contrebandiers," *Business News*, June 10, 2013.

48 Aziz M., "Frontière algéro-libyenne: Le boom du trafic d'armes," *El Watan*, June 21, 2013; "Algérie: surveillance renforcé à la frontière tunisienne," Agence France-Presse, May 4, 2013. If true, the reports about Algerian deployments in Tunisia would mark a shift from Algeria's public stance on the deployment of Algerian forces outside of Algerian borders.

49 The attack was conducted by approximately 50 fighters, matching some estimates of the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade's size, and reportedly involved a mix of Algerians, Tunisians, and Libyans. See "Algérie: un groupe armé attaque une caserne militaire," Radio France Internationale, February 7, 2013.

50 According to an *El Watan* article, "Concerning the origins of the people captured, Ali Laarayedh indicated that the majority of these terrorists are originally from the Kasserine governorate and were known for their activities in protests organized by Ansar al-Shari`a." See Mourad Sellami, "Les precisions du ministre de l'Interieur tunisien," *El Watan*, December 22, 2012. Also see Imed O., "Selon les services de renseignement spéciaux tunisiens: Abou Iyadh aurait visité les terroristes au mont Chaambi," *Liberté-Algérie*, June 15, 2013; Lebovich.

51 For its part, AQIM might lose traction if it found itself in an actual fight with the Tunisian state, as that could darken many Tunisians' perceptions of it.

52 Al-Ilah.

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Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

June 1, 2013 (UNITED STATES): Al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) released a new six-minute, English-subtitled audio message addressed "to the American People." The message said, "The Boston events...and the poisoned letters [sent to the White House], regardless of who is behind them, show that your security is no longer under control, and that attacks on you have taken off and cannot be stopped. Everyday you will be hit by the unexpected and your leaders will not be able to defend you." Qasim al-Raymi, who read the statement, is AQAP's military chief. – *Sky News, June 2; CBS/AP, June 2*

June 1, 2013 (IRAQ): The Iraqi Defense Ministry said that they foiled a plot by an al-Qa`ida cell to execute poison gas attacks in the Middle East, Europe and North America. The militants may have been planning to use remote-controlled toy planes to distribute the gas. Iraqi officials said that they arrested five suspects who had been using three facilities in Iraq to try to produce sarin and mustard gas using instructions from another al-Qa`ida group. The cell, however, had not yet been able to produce any lethal chemical agents. – *Fox News, June 1; BBC, June 1*

June 1, 2013 (MAURITANIA): Mauritanian officials announced that U.S. authorities recently transferred Yunis al-Mauritani, a senior al-Qa`ida operative previously held in Afghanistan, to their custody. – *Reuters, June 1*

June 2, 2013 (SYRIA): A car bomb exploded near a police station in Jubar district of Damascus, killing at least eight Syrian security forces. It was not clear which group was behind the attack, but the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights suspected that it had been carried out by Jabhat al-Nusra, an al-Qa`ida-linked Salafi-jihadi militant group. – *France24, June 2*

June 2, 2013 (YEMEN): A suicide bomber tried to drive an explosives-laden vehicle into a gas pumping station in the southern port city of Balhaf, but gunfire from Yemeni guards detonated the vehicle prematurely. Besides the bomber, there were no casualties and the gas facility was unaffected. – *Reuters, June 2*

June 3, 2013 (GLOBAL): The U.S. State Department offered a $7 million reward for information leading to the location of Abubakar Shekau, the leader of Boko Haram in Nigeria. The U.S. government also authorized rewards up to $5 million each for information leading to the location of Yahya Abu al-Hammam, a leader in al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and Mokhtar Belmokhtar, a former leader in AQIM who now heads his own militia. It also offered $3 million each for information leading to the location of AQIM leader Malik Abu Abdelkarim and Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) spokesperson Oumar Ould Hamaha. – *Daily Post, June 4*

June 3, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber on a motorbike attacked a passing U.S. military patrol in Paktia Province, killing two U.S.-led coalition service members. The explosion also killed at least 10 schoolchildren and a police officer. – *Guardian, June 3; Voice of America, June 3*

June 3, 2013 (INDONESIA): A suicide bomber on a motorbike detonated his explosives at a police compound in Poso in Central Sulawesi, killing only himself. A police source told Agence France-Presse that the bomber was suspected of being part of an Islamist terrorist group led by Santoso, Indonesia's most wanted militant. – *Australian Broadcasting Corporation, June 3; AFP, June 3*

June 4, 2013 (MALI): A suicide bomber blew himself up in the northern Mali city of Kidal after being chased by authorities. The bomber was the only casualty. – *Voice of America, June 4; Reuters, June 4*

June 5, 2013 (IRAQ): Gunmen ambushed a bus and executed 15 passengers on a desert road between Anbar Province and Karbala. The dead included 10 border police and five local residents. Authorities blamed al-Qa`ida in Iraq for the attack, saying, "Those terrorists hunt people along this road and kill according to religious sect." – *Reuters, June 5*

June 5, 2013 (SYRIA): Syrian troops and Hizb Allah fighters captured the strategic border down of Qusayr from anti-government rebels. According to Voice of America, "the rebels had held Qusayr for more than a year in their overall struggle to topple the government of President Bashar al-Assad. Its loss to government forces represented a major blow to rebels, whose most effective fighting units, the al-Qa`ida-linked al-Nusra Front [Jabhat al-Nusra], were defending the town." – *Voice of America, June 5*

June 6, 2013 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new audio message, urging Syrians to unite to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad and prevent what he claimed was a U.S. plot to establish a client state in Syria to protect Israel's security. – *Reuters, June 6*

June 6, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber drove a truck filled with explosives into a military base in Helmand Province, killing at least six Georgian soldiers. The Afghan Taliban claimed responsibility. – *Reuters, June 6*

June 6, 2013 (RUSSIA/SYRIA): The head of the Russian security service, the FSB, said that approximately 200 Russian Islamists who support North Caucasus insurgents are fighting in Syria for al-Qa`ida. "The fact that around 200 fighters from Russia are fighting on the side of the Caucasus Emirate under the flag of al-Qa`ida and other related structures provokes concern in Russia," FSB chief Alexander Bortnikov said. – *AFP, June 6*

June 7, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle targeted a convoy of buses carrying Iranian Shi`a pilgrims near Muqdadiya, killing at least nine of them. – *RFE/RL, June 7; BBC, June 7*

June 7, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A U.S. drone reportedly killed six suspected militants in the Shawal area of North Waziristan Agency in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Pakistan's *Dawn* newspaper said that it was the "first such attack since Nawaz Sharif was sworn in as prime minister this week." – *Dawn, June 8*

June 9, 2013 (IRAQ/SYRIA): Al-Jazira claimed to have obtained a copy of a letter from al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri addressed to the leaders of the Syria-based Jabhat al-Nusra and the Iraq-based Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). In the letter, al-Zawahiri said that ISI chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was "wrong" to declare a merger between the ISI and Jabhat al-Nusra, adding that al-Baghdadi's rule was limited to Iraq. Al-Baghdadi had appeared to unilaterally announce the merger of the two groups in April 2013, but was rebuffed by Jabhat al-Nusra, which said that they pledge allegiance to

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Ayman al-Zawahiri but that they would not merge with the ISI. – *al-Jazira, June 9; Voice of America, June 10*

June 9, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber detonated an explosives-laden vehicle at a police checkpoint outside a Shi`a district in northwest Baghdad, killing at least seven people. – *Reuters, June 9*

June 10, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): Militants tried to attack NATO's headquarters at Kabul international airport. The attack, which involved suicide bombers, left seven militants dead, with Afghan authorities saying that the attack was thwarted. Two civilians were wounded. – *Guardian, June 10*

June 10, 2013 (IRAQ): Two car bombs exploded and a suicide bomber in another vehicle detonated his explosives at a produce market in Jadidat al-Shatt in Diyala Province. The three bombs killed at least 13 people. – *RFE/RL, June 10*

June 11, 2013 (SYRIA): Two suicide bombers detonated their explosives at a square in central Damascus, killing at least 14 people. – *AFP, June 11; Los Angeles Times, June 11*

June 11, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): An Afghan Taliban suicide bomber in a vehicle attacked the entrance to Afghanistan's Supreme Court in Kabul, killing at least 17 people. – *AFP, June 11; al-Jazira, June 12*

June 15, 2013 (IRAQ/SYRIA): The head of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, released a new audio message appearing to defy the orders of al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri not to merge with Jabhat al-Nusra, saying that "the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant remains [in existence], as long as there is blood in our veins and our eyes are blinking…It remains, and we will not compromise; we will not give up…until we die." Al-Baghdadi also said, "I chose the command of God over the command that runs against it in the [al-Zawahiri] letter." – *AFP, June 15; AP, June 15*

June 15, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A female suicide bomber detonated explosives on a bus carrying students of the Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University in Quetta. After the explosion, a male suicide bomber was waiting inside the BMC Hospital ward for the arrival of high level officials, and he blew himself up when they arrived. In total, 25 people were killed, including 14 students of the women's university, four nurses and Deputy Commissioner of Quetta Abdul Mansoor Kakar. The sectarian militant group Lashkar-i-Jhangvi claimed responsibility. – *Dawn, June 16*

June 16, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber detonated explosives inside a crowded café in a largely Shi`a neighborhood of Baghdad, killing 11 people. – *AP, June 16*

June 16, 2013 (PAKISTAN): Two anti-polio vaccination volunteers were shot and killed while visiting homes in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. – *CNN, June 17*

June 17, 2013 (KENYA): Kenyan police shot to death two suspected militants after they refused to surrender during a raid on a house in Mombasa. Police accused the men of plotting attacks in Kenya on behalf of Somalia's al-Shabab militant group. – *Reuters, June 17*

June 18, 2013 (IRAQ): Two suicide bombers shot to death the guards outside the Habib ibn Mathaher Shi`a mosque in Baghdad, and then detonated their explosives inside the building. The double suicide attack killed at least 31 people. – *BBC, June 18*

June 18, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated explosives in a crowd of hundreds of mourners attending a funeral in the village of Sher Garh in Mardan District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, killing 29 people. Among the dead was a recently elected lawmaker who may have been the target. The lawmaker, Imran Khan Mohmand, campaigned as an independent, but later supported the party of cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan. – *AP, June 18*

June 19, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bombing killed the leader of a provincial political party and four of his relatives in Ninawa Province. The leader, Yunus al-Ramah, was the head of the United Iraq Party. The incident occurred one day before elections in Ninawa and Anbar provinces, two Sunni-majority provinces where the April 20 polls were delayed due to security concerns. – *AFP, June 19*

June 19, 2013 (YEMEN): A suicide bomber on a motorbike detonated his explosives in the middle of a market in Yemen's mainly Shi`a city of Sa`da, killing two civilians. – *AFP, June 19*

June 19, 2013 (SOMALIA): Al-Shabab militants launched a major attack on the UN Development Program compound in Mogadishu, killing at least 15 people, including four foreigners. – *BBC, June 19; Bloomberg, June 19*

June 20, 2013 (UNITED STATES): The U.S. federal government charged Eric Harroun with conspiring to provide material support to a designated terrorist organization and with conspiring to use weapons of mass destruction overseas. Harroun, a former U.S. Army medic from Arizona, allegedly fought in Syria against the Bashar al-Assad regime in coordination with the al-Qa`ida-linked Jabhat al-Nusra militant group. He was arrested near Dulles International Airport in Virginia in March 2013. – *Politico, June 21*

June 20, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): The Afghan Taliban announced that they are ready to free U.S. Army soldier Bowe Bergdahl in exchange for five of their senior operatives held at Guantanamo Bay. Bergdahl, the only known American captive from the war in Afghanistan, has been held by the Afghan Taliban since 2009. – *AP, June 20*

June 20, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber killed three people at a vote counting center in Ramadi, Anbar Province. – *AFP, June 21*

June 21, 2013 (SPAIN): Spanish security forces broke up an al-Qa`ida-linked network accused of sending fighters to Syria, arresting eight people. The raids occurred in Ceuta, a Spanish territory in North Africa. – *AFP, June 21*

June 21, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A bomb tore through a Shi`a Muslim religious center in Peshawar, killing at least 15 people. – *Voice of America, June 21*

June 22, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives inside a Shi`a mosque in northern Baghdad, killing at least 12 people. – *Reuters, June 22*

June 23, 2013 (PAKISTAN): Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants killed nine foreign mountain climbers, including a U.S. citizen, at a camp at Nanga Parbat, the world's ninth-tallest mountain. The

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

TTP said that the attack was in retaliation for the U.S. drone strike that killed Waliur Rahman, the second-in-command of the TTP, on May 29, 2013. – *Washington Post, June 23*

June 23, 2013 (SYRIA): A car bomb exploded in Aleppo in northern Syria, killing 12 soldiers. Jabhat al-Nusra, a Salafi-jihadi group linked to al-Qa`ida, claimed responsibility. – *AP, June 23; AP, June 25*

June 23, 2013 (SYRIA): Three suicide bombers detonated their explosives while trying to break into the Rukn al-Din police station in northern Damascus, killing five people. Jabhat al-Nusra, a Salafi-jihadi group linked to al-Qa`ida, claimed responsibility. – *AP, June 23; AFP, June 23; AP, June 25*

June 24, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber killed an Iraqi counterterrorism official as he left a university in Tikrit. The official, Colonel Ghazi Ali al-Jubouri, was the head of counterterrorism for Salah al-Din Province. – *Reuters, June 24*

June 25, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): Five Afghan Taliban gunmen and suicide bombers targeted the Ariana Hotel, which the Taliban claim is the location for a CIA base, and the presidential palace in Kabul. The bombers drove at least two land cruisers similar to those used by NATO soldiers, as well as fake badges and vehicle passes, which allowed at least one of the bombers to gain access to a heavily guarded area. The Afghan Interior Ministry said that three Afghan security guards and all five assailants were killed. – *New York Times, June 24; AFP, June 25*

June 25, 2013 (IRAQ): Two suicide bombers detonated explosives at a protest camp near Tuz Khurmato, Salah al-Din Province, killing at least 10 people. The protesters were reportedly ethnic Turkmen demanding better security for the area. The dead included Ali Hashim Muhtaroglu, the deputy head of the Torkoman Front, along with two of his sons. – *BBC, June 25; RFE/RL, June 26*

June 26, 2013 (UNITED STATES): U.S. federal authorities announced that Justin Kaliebe, an 18-year-old Long Island high school student, pleaded guilty to providing material support to terrorists in a secret hearing on February 8, 2013. Kaliebe was allegedly inspired by Usama bin Ladin and attempted to travel to Yemen to join al-Qa`ida operatives waging "violent jihad." According to NBC News, "Investigators said Kaliebe approached an undercover officer about joining a terror group and admitted he followed teachings of terrorist Yemeni cleric Anwar al-Awlaki and Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman—the blind sheik tied to the 1993 World Trade Center bombing." He was arrested on January 21, 2013, at Kennedy Airport trying to fly to Yemen. – *NBC News, June 26*

June 26, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A bomb exploded on a busy street during rush hour in Karachi. The bomb targeted Judge Maqbool Baqir, who has worked on a number of terrorism cases. The judge and eight members of his security detail were killed in the blast. – *AFP, June 26*

June 27, 2013 (UNITED STATES): A federal grand jury in Boston indicted Dzhokhar Tsarnaev in the Boston Marathon bombings, charging him with detonating a weapon of mass destruction. Tsarnaev could face the death penalty or life in prison. – *Los Angeles Times, June 27*

June 27, 2013 (SYRIA): A suicide bomber killed at least four people in a Christian area of Damascus. – *AAP, June 28*

June 27, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber attacked a NATO convoy in Farah Province, killing two civilians. – *AP, June 29*

June 29, 2013 (THAILAND): A roadside bomb killed eight Thai soldiers in Yala Province in southern Thailand. Authorities suspected that Muslim separatist insurgents were to blame for the attack. – *Bangkok Post, June 29*

June 30, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber killed at least 28 people in a Shi`a area of Quetta, Baluchistan Province. The sectarian militant group Lashkar-i-Jhangvi claimed responsibility. – *Express Tribune, June 30; BBC, June 30; Dawn, July 1*

June 30, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A remotely-detonated bomb targeted security forces in Peshawar, leaving 17 people dead. – *BBC, June 30; UPI, June 30*

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