Since the Nigerian militant group Boko Haram launched its first attack in northern Nigeria in September 2010, it has carried out more than 700 attacks that have killed more than 3,000 people. Boko Haram primarily targets Nigerian government officials and security officers, traditional and secular Muslim leaders, and Christians. It has also attacked schools, churches, cell phone towers, media houses, and government facilities, including border posts, police stations and prisons. Since January 2012, however, a new militant group has attracted more attention in northern Nigeria due to its threat to foreign interests. Jama’at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan (commonly known as Ansaru) announced that it split from Boko Haram in January 2012, claiming when approximately 50 fighters attacked Bauchi prison and freed more than 150 Boko Haram members. An additional 500 prisoners were also freed, some of whom joined Boko Haram. Before 2010, Boko Haram was known as the “Nigerian Taliban,” among other names. See Sani Muhd Sani, “Attack On Bauchi Prison - Boko Haram Frees 721 Inmates,” Leadership, September 8, 2010.

1 The group Boko Haram identifies itself as Jama’at Ahl al-Sunna li al-Da’wa wa al-Jihad, which is Arabic for “People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad.” The term “Boko Haram” means “Western education is sinful” in the Hausa language in Nigeria.


3 Boko Haram’s first attack with the name Jama’at Ahl al-Sunna li al-Da’wa wa al-Jihad was on September 7, 2010, attacked schools, churches, cell phone towers, media houses, and government facilities, including border posts, police stations and prisons. Since January 2012, however, a new militant group has attracted more attention in northern Nigeria due to its threat to foreign interests. Jama’at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan (commonly known as Ansaru) announced that it split from Boko Haram in January 2012, claiming when approximately 50 fighters attacked Bauchi prison and freed more than 150 Boko Haram members. An additional 500 prisoners were also freed, some of whom joined Boko Haram. Before 2010, Boko Haram was known as the “Nigerian Taliban,” among other names. See Sani Muhd Sani, “Attack On Bauchi Prison - Boko Haram Frees 721 Inmates,” Leadership, September 8, 2010.

4 Ansaru also refers to itself as JAMBS—the acronym for Jama’at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan. In Arabic, this means “Supporters of the Muslims in the Land of the Blacks.”
That same month, the U.S. firmed.

northern Mali in March 2013, but this has not been con... and he masterminded the four-day siege at the gas plant at In Amenas, Algeria, in January 2013.

Ansaru may have carried out its first operation in May 2011 when Chris McManus and Franco Lamolina—A British and Italian engineer of an Italian construction company—were kidnapped near the border with Niger in Kebbi State, northwest Nigeria. A previously unknown group called “al-Qa’ida in the Lands Beyond the Sahel” took responsibility in a proof-of-life video showing the two hostages blindfolded and kneeling in front of three veiled militants. The video was sent to Mauritanian’s Agence Nouakhchott d’Information (ANI), which usually receives AQIM videos. Employing the same Mauritanian negotiator that AQIM used in several previous kidnappings, the militants reportedly demanded $6 million and the release of prisoners in West Africa in return for the two hostages.

On March 7, 2012, Nigerian security forces broke up a Boko Haram Shura Council meeting in Kaduna led by Abu Muhammed, who defected from Boko Haram due to disagreements with Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau. The security forces determined from phone call logs and interrogations of the Shura Council members that Abu Muhammed was responsible for the British and Italian hostages and that the hostages were transferred to a house in Sokoto, north of Kebbi State. On March 8, 2012, the captors shot both hostages when they saw helicopters of the UK Special Boat Service carrying out surveillance on the house. Soon after, UK and Nigerian forces killed eight of the captors and detained eight others in a late effort to free the hostages. The detained captors confessed that they had “standing orders to kill the hostages immediately on sight of security agents, since we were not sure of surviving an encounter with the security men.” This established a precedent that any attempt to free hostages would lead to their immediate deaths.

In June 2012, a Boko Haram informant alleged long-time AQIM member Khalid al-Barnawi coordinated the kidnappings of the British and Italian hostages with Abu Muhammed, and that Abu Muhammed had trained under al-Barnawi at an AQIM-run camp in Algeria. That same month, the U.S. government designated al-Barnawi as a “global terrorist” along with two other militants, Abubakar Adam Kambar, who trained under al-Barnawi at the AQIM camp in Algeria, and Boko Haram’s leader, Abubakar Shekau. Nigerian security sources reported that members

5 Ansaru announced its “public formation” and break from Boko Haram in flyers distributed in Kano on January 26, 2012, which was six days after Boko Haram attacked government offices in Kano, leaving more than 150 civilians dead, mostly Muslims. See “Boko Haram: Splinter Group, Ansaru Emerges,” Vanguard, February 1, 2012.


7 “Boko Haram: Splinter Group, Ansaru Emerges.”

8 Belmokhtar led an AQIM brigade in the Sahel from 2007 until he was reportedly dismissed from AQIM in late 2012. He continued to lead loyal fighters, however, and he masterminded the four-day siege at the gas plant at In Amenas, Algeria, in January 2013.

9 Chadian forces claim to have killed Belmokhtar in northern Mali in March 2013, but this has not been confirmed.

10 In all Ansaru video statements, its leader and members conceal their identities with veils and obscure their voices. Boko Haram, in contrast, shows leader Abubakar Shekau’s face in all of its videos. This shows that Ansaru does not want to reveal the identity of its leader.

11 The militants’ Sahelian-style veils in the Kebbi proof-of-life videos, which are also worn by the militants on Ansaru’s website, differ from Boko Haram members who usually wear Western-style military fatigues. See Ansaru’s website at www.ansarulmuslimun.wapka.mobi/index.xhtml.

12 Mustapha Ould Limum Chaffi was the negotiator. See “Exclusive...Mort des deux otages occidentaux tués au Nigeria: Une source d’AQMI livre quelques détails,” Agence Nouakhchott d’Information, March 10, 2012.

13 In a late effort to free the hostages. The captors shot both hostages when they saw helicopters of the UK Special Boat Service carrying out surveillance on the house.

14 Ibid.


17 The U.S. designated Boko Haram as a “global terrorist” in June 2012, and in November 2012 the UK Home Office minister proscribed Boko Haram as a terrorist organization that is “anti-Nigerian government, anti-Western and broadly aligned with al-Qa’ida.” See “Barnawi, Kambar: Qaeda-linked Militants with Boko Haram Ties.”

of Shekau’s faction tipped off Nigerian intelligence about Abu Muhammed and other “traitorous” cells in northwestern Nigeria that broke from Shekau and did not focus on fighting the Nigerian government. Shekau’s spokesman also denied that Boko Haram carried out the kidnapping on the day after the hostages were killed, and said, “We have never been involved in hostage-taking, and we never ask for ransom.”

Although Ansaru did not yet exist as a formal organization at the time of the kidnapping, some suspect that Khalid al-Barnawi later formed Ansaru. Additionally, when speaking before the UK House of Commons in November 2012, Home Office Minister Mark Harper said that Ansaru is “also believed to be responsible for the murder of British national Christopher McManus and his Italian co-worker Franco Lamolinara in March 2012.”

On March 26, 2012, Nigerian security forces raided a shop in Kano and detained the kidnapping cell’s leader, a Mauritanian, and three Nigerian accomplices, who used the Mauritanian’s shop as a base. Documents in the Mauritanian’s laptop, including an AQIM operations manual, led Nigerian special forces to carry out a rescue operation of the German engineer in May 2012, but the captors shot the hostage immediately. AQIM warned European countries not to engage in “foolishness” during future hostage negotiations and for Germany to stop violating Muslims and their holy sites. This kidnapping was claimed by AQIM and carried out by an AQIM member and local militants. Evidence uncovered from Kaduna, where Abu Muhammed was arrested, reportedly provided leads to the cell, and AQIM referred to the first operation in Sokoto in its claim. As AQIM was not known to operate in Nigeria and Boko Haram did not engage in kidnapping operations at this time, it is plausible that Ansaru played a role in the kidnapping, especially since it followed the group’s modus operandi.

“The attack revealed that Ansaru was able to operate in Kogi State, which is considered a ‘staging point’ for attacking southern Nigeria because it has direct road links to all three of Nigeria’s southern zones.”

Starting in June 2012, Ansaru sent a series of e-mails to the Kaduna-based Desert Herald newspaper and released English- and Hausa-language YouTube videos affirming that Ansaru disapproved of Boko Haram’s killing of Muslims. In these communications, Ansaru said they would target the citizens and interests of “foreign Christian enemies in all parts of Africa,” but that Ansaru's and Boko Haram’s missions were otherwise the same. Then, on November 26, 2012, 40 Ansaru militants attacked the Special Anti-Robbery Squad prison in Abuja with the “assistance of internal collaborators,” according to the military and police. The attack freed senior Boko Haram commanders and was praised in a YouTube video from Boko Haram leader Shekau, which was addressed to the “Soldiers of God in the Islamic State of Mali.” Ansaru’s freeing of Boko Haram prisoners and Shekau’s video statement suggested that despite the circumstances surrounding Ansaru’s formation, the graphics and quality of Ansaru’s videos are significantly higher than Boko Haram’s videos, which suggest that Ansaru had a higher level of training in media and propaganda than Boko Haram or possibly exposure to AQIM’s professional media wing, al-Andalus. See “World Exclusive: Another Islamic Sect Emerges…to Counter Boko Haram!” Desert Herald, June 2, 2012; “Latest: Security Officials and Christians are Enemies of Islam and Muslims, We Will Target and Kill Them—Says Spokesman of Jama’atu Ansarul Muslimina fi Biladis Sudan,” Abu Ja’afar,” Desert Herald, June 5, 2012; “Important Message From Jama’atu Ansarul Muslimina fi Biladis Sudan,” November 26, 2012, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZ-6STrj2tI; “Video of Introduction of Jama’atu Ansarul Muslimina fi Biladis-Sudan,” November 9, 2012, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6ATD6bLaBl.

29 Ibid.

25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 The statement in English and Arabic is available at www.jihadology.net.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
two groups were capable of supporting each other’s mutual objectives.  

This operation in Abuja marked the first time Ansaru formally claimed responsibility for an attack.

Fourth Operation

On December 19, 2012, 30 Ansaru militants kidnapped a Frenchman from the compound of an energy company near the border with Niger in Katsina State, northwestern Nigeria. According to the Katsina police commissioner, the “coordination, speed, and expertise” of the operation suggested that employees of the company were involved in an “inside job.” Ansaru claimed the kidnapping and said that it would continue to kidnap French citizens until France ended its ban on the Islamic veil for women and abandoned its plans to intervene militarily in northern Mali.

Fifth Operation

On January 19, 2013, Ansaru militants, possibly acting on a tip, ambushed a convoy of three buses carrying 180 Nigerian soldiers through Okene, Kogi State, en route to Mali, killing two soldiers. Ansaru claimed the troops “were aiming to demolish the Islamic Empire of Mali” and warned African countries to “stop helping Western countries fight Muslims.” The attack revealed that Ansaru was able to operate in Kogi State, which is considered a “staging point” for attacking southern Nigeria because it has direct road links to all three of Nigeria’s southern zones.

Sixth Operation

On February 16, 2013, Ansaru assaulted a prison and then kidnapped seven foreign engineers from a construction site in northeastern Nigeria’s Bauchi State. Ansaru warned that any attempt to free the hostages would result in the “same happenings” as the previous.

“Since the formation of AQIM in 2006-2007, AQIM’s Arab-Algerian southern zone commanders, such as Mokhtar Belmokhtar, sought to expand their operations from southern Algeria southwards into Mali, Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria to target the increasing number of foreigners and energy and mining companies in the Sahel.”


Belmokhtar’s Role in Ansaru

Since the formation of AQIM in 2006-2007, AQIM’s Arab-Algerian southern zone commanders, such as Mokhtar Belmokhtar, sought to expand their operations from southern Algeria southwards into Mali, Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria to target the increasing number of foreigners and energy and mining companies in the Sahel. One factor constraining AQIM, however, was that its northern African members did not master the southern Sahel’s physical and human terrain as well as the Tuaregs and sub-Saharan Africans from the region. As a result, AQIM “coached” sub-Saharan Africans—such as Khalid al-Barnawi, Abu Muhammed and Abubakar Adam Kambar—in kidnappings and criminal activities and used sub-Saharan recruits as couriers between AQIM and local Islamist militant groups such as Boko Haram. An example of this

32 The Nigerian police claimed that only five prisoners escaped, while Ansaru alleged that the rescue operation freed 37 members and 286 other prisoners, who were subject to “real human rights violations,” including “extrajudicial killings,” “termitees” and “a complete lack of water.”

33 “Declared of Jama’atu Ansaril Muslimeen Fihiladis Sudan Garki II Abuja.”


35 “Islamist Group Ansar ‘Kidnapped’ French Man,” BBC, December 24, 2012. It is unknown what happened to the Frenchman, but he may have been taken across the border into Niger or Mali, where AQIM held six other French hostages.


37 Ibid.

38 Nigeria is unofficially divided into six geopolitical zones, with all 36 of the country’s states and Abuja Federal Capital Territory falling into one of the six zones. The zones do not represent ethnic or religious homogeneity and are broadly accepted in political discourse by almost all Nigerians. Kogi is in the North-Central zone, although geographically Okene, Kogi, is in the southern half of Nigeria. See “Combined Forces Raid Arrests Terror Suspects...Seizes 10 Ak-47 Rifles, Smg, 3 Pistols, Anti-Tank Explosives, Ieds and Ammo Near Okene, Kogi State,” Beegeagle’s Blog, May 16, 2012.


40 It is unclear whether three of the seven hostages were actually killed, since the video shows only four bodies. The Arabic and English statements are available at www.jihadology.net and “The Killing of Seven the hostages because of Nigerian media reports that British “jet fighters, soldiers, and intelligence” landed in Abuja to prepare for a rescue mission and that UK and Nigerian security forces had killed Muslims in previous attempts to rescue “Christian hostages.”

41 Ansaru appears to have failed in two attempts to kidnap foreign engineers from separate construction sites in Tella, Taraba State, on February 28, 2013, and may have been behind the kidnapping of an Italian engineer in southern Nigeria’s Kwara State, where kidnappings are uncommon. Like the German engineer in Kano, the Italian was working on a road construction project when taken captive. The Italian was released in June 2012, but officials did not release details about the terms of the release. See “2 Nigerian Cops Killed in Aborted Kidnap of Foreigner,” PM News, February 28, 2013; “Italian Abducted in Nigeria Freed,” BBC, June 1, 2012.


43 According to North Africa expert Dr. Geoff D. Porter, “One of the factors restraining the pace of AQIM’s operations in the Sahara and Sahel has been the lack of targets and the inability of AQIM members who are not from the region to move throughout the desert.” For details, see ibid. Also see Salima Tlemcani, “Rêvélations sur une organisation en déroute,” El Watan, August 1, 2007; Yaroslav Trofimov, “Islamic Rebels Gain Strength in the Sahara,” Wall Street Journal, August 15, 2009.

44 In 2007, Nigeria arrested three of its citizens who
strategy’s effectiveness was the January 7, 2011, kidnapping of two Frenchmen from a restaurant in the French and Hausa-speaking capital city of Niamey, Niger. The two men were scouted by a Nigerian Boko Haram member who provided their location to other Hausa, Arabic and French-speaking members of Boko Haram’s Veiled Brigades.45 The hostages were both killed the following day when French military helicopters fired on the kidnappers as their vehicle convoy approached the Malian border.46 Boko Haram never claimed responsibility for the kidnapping, even though one of its members was reportedly involved.

In 2011, AQIM may have moved from recruiting sub-Saharan Africans to overseeing them form their own groups with indigenous ideologies that appealed to sub-Saharan Africans in a way that AQIM’s ideology did not.47 The two sub-Saharan African groups, Ansaru and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), likely conducted their first kidnapping operations in May 2011 and October 2011, respectively, while MUJAO announced its formation in a video statement in December 2011 and Ansaru through flyers distributed in Kano in January 2012. The two groups were independent of AQIM in name, but MUJAO’s military commander was long-time AQIM kidnapping mastermind Oumar Ould Hamaha, an Arab from northern Mali and a relative of Belmokhtar’s, and Ansaru is suspected of being led by Khalid al-Barnawi, who fought under Belmokhtar in Mauritania and Algeria in the mid-2000s and carried out kidnappings in Niger.48 Both Ansaru and MUJAO adopted names reflecting their desired areas of operations, Belaldis Sudan (Black Africa) and Gharb Afriqiyya (West Africa), respectively, and considered themselves to be the “ideological descendants” of Usman dan Fodio and other pre-colonial West African Islamic leaders “who fought the colonial invaders,” although in practice Ansaru operated in northern Nigeria and MUJAO operated in Mali, Senegal, Algeria and Mauritania.49

Evidence suggests that Ansaru and MUJAO may have been among the elite units Belmokhtar trained for attacking Western interests in the Sahel.”

of Belmokhtar’s Veiled Brigades.45 The hostages were both killed the following day when French military helicopters fired on the kidnappers as their vehicle convoy approached the Malian border.46 Boko Haram never claimed

had trained with AQIM (then called the GSPC) in Algeria from 2005 to 2007 and were planning to attack U.S. government buildings in Nigeria. See “Five Nigerians on Terror Charges,” BBC, November 23, 2007. AQIM featured sub-Saharan recruits in an August 2010 video with members speaking West African languages, such as Hassaniya Arabic of Mauritania, Fulani, Tuareg dialects, Guinean Portuguese, and Hausa, the common language of southern Niger and northern Nigeria. See “Summary and Analysis of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb’s New Video Release ‘On The Occasion of Ramadan Fighting is Ordained for You,’” Jihadology.net, August 22, 2010. A Beninese national of Yoruba ethnicity, Abdoulah Abdoulah, was reportedly a courier between AQIM and Boko Haram in Nigeria and involved in recruiting AQIM members from French-speaking West African countries. See “Ansar Dine Pursues Peace Talks, Muyao Names New Chief,” LeMag, January 3, 2012; “Mali: un Béninois à la tête d’une unité combattante, une katiba, dans le Nord,” Radio France Internationale, December 28, 2012. Belmokhtar used cigarette smugglers to establish contacts with African fighters. See Rabi Ould Idamous, “Faltering al-Qaeda Turns to Boko Haram,” Magharebia, January 27, 2012. 45 Nathalie Guibert, “Comment sont morts les otages français du Niger,” Le Monde, January 6, 2012. 46 A French investigation concluded that the Nigerian was from Boko Haram’s base city, Maiduguri, and his phone call logs showed that he was an intermediary between Boko Haram and AQIM in Nigeria, Niger and Mali. See “Two French Hostages in Niger Killed in Rescue Attempt,” BBC, January 8, 2011; “Une piste nigériane dans l’enquête sur la mort des deux otages français enlevés au Niger,” Radio France Internationale, November 14, 2011. 47 “Brainstorming the Geopolitics of AQIM’s Moorish Appeal,” The Moor Next Door blog, August 25, 2009. 48 Most reports, including from the U.S. State Department, say that al-Barnawi is from Borno State, Nigeria, although Radio France Internationale and Agence Nouakchott d’Information have reported that al-Barnawi is Nigerian. See Emmanuel. 49 “New Qaeda Spin-Off Threatens West Africa,” Agence France-Presse, December 22, 2011; “Sénégal: Les Islamistes ‘sont à nos portes’, Jeune Afrique, August 7, 2012; “Route de Kati: Des présumés membres du Mujao arrêtés,” Journaldumali.com, March 7, 2013. 50 Another possible link between Ansaru and AQIM comes from a letter sent to a Kano radio station “condemning the jihad of our brothers that killed an American envoy and some non Muslims” after the attack on the U.S. diplomatic compound in Bengazi, Libya, which was linked to Belmokhtar and Libyan jihadists. See “Another Islamist Sect Surfaces In Kano, Threatens To Bomb Radio Station,” Sahara Reporters, September 16, 2012. 51 Although the United Kingdom or the hostages’ families reportedly paid AQIM $1 million to release the two hostages in the Kebbi kidnapping and Germany released the female jihadist website administrator and recruiter from prison early, Ansaru did not free the hostages in either case. In addition, MUJAO reportedly received $88 million in June 2012 for the release of three hostages that it kidnapped in southwestern Algeria in October 2011. See Isa Saidu, “Before Killing Briton, Italian...Kidnappers Received N207 Million Ransom,” Daily Trust, March 12, 2012; “German Terrorism Convict Granted Early Release,” Associated Press, April 24, 2012. 52 Belmokhtar’s kidnapping style by infiltrating foreign energy companies and targeting European employees whose countries were susceptible to ransoms and political demands.51 If not for the French-led military operation in northern Mali, the relationship between Belmokhtar and the two sub-Saharan groups would likely have continued, although

“Evidence suggests that Ansaru and MUJAO may have been among the elite units Belmokhtar trained for attacking Western interests in the Sahel.”

“AQIM’s support may have helped Boko Haram evolve from a Taliban-inspired religious movement under Yusuf into a full-fledged militant movement under Shekau. There were several factors, however, that likely compelled AQIM to coordinate kidnapping operations in Nigeria with Ansaru, rather than with Boko Haram.”

both groups may have become more independent with the development of their own media wings, ideologies, and in Ansaru’s case leadership in Nigeria outside of AQIM’s area of operations. According to Nigerian intelligence documents, an “Algerian terrorist group” and Boko Haram had
Why Ansaru, Not Boko Haram?

AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel offered “consolation” to Boko Haram after the clashes with Nigerian security forces in July 2009 left Boko Haram founder Muhammad Yusuf and 1,000 of his followers dead.44 In February 2010, Droukdel also offered to provide Boko Haram with “men, arms and ammunition” to “defend” Nigerian Muslims against the “Christian minority”55 in Nigeria.56 In July 2010, before the one year anniversary of the July 2009 clashes, Yusuf’s former deputy, Abubakar Shekau, emerged from hiding and “sent condolences” from the mujahidin in Nigeria to key al-Qa’ida leaders, including Usama bin Ladin, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and the amir of AQIM, and warned the United States that “jihad has just begun.”57 This and subsequent statements from Shekau showed that Boko Haram identified with al-Qa’ida’s ideology, but that Boko Haram was “waging jihad in the country called Nigeria.”58

From July 2009 until Boko Haram launched its first attack in September 2010, many Boko Haram members retreated to Nigeria’s borderlands with Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, and solicited, according to one report, as much as 40%59 of their funding from abroad.60 From September 2010 until August 2011, Boko Haram attacks escalated as President Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the south, was inaugurated in Abuja in April 2011, and with Boko Haram’s first vehicle-born suicide bombings at the Federal Police Headquarters and UN Headquarters in Abuja in June and August 2011.61 In August 2011, Nigeria

Usama bin Ladin through AQIM. Boko Haram, however, never formally affiliated with AQIM or al-Qa’ida central. In November 2011, a Boko Haram spokesman said that, “It is true we have links with al-Qa’ida. They assist us and we assist them. Any Muslim group that is struggling to establish an Islamic state can get support from al-Qa’ida if they reach out to them.” For all these details, see Abu Muslim al-Jazaari, “The Platform of Tawhid and Jihad,” Jihadology.net, March 2011; “The Brigades of Tawhid in Nigeria,” Arrahmah.com, August 22, 2009; “From Your Mushajideen Brothers In Nigeria,” Ansar1.info, April 2, 2011; “Periodical Review July 2010 – No. 2,” ICT’s Jihadi Websites Monitoring Group, August 2010; “Islamist Sect Website Claims Nigerian Bombings,” Agence France-Presse, December 28, 2010; “Nigeria Sect ‘Spokesman’ Claims Al-Qaeda Links,” Agence Presse-France, November 24, 2011; Tobí Soniyi, “Ashafa Admitted Al-Qa’ida Link, Ex-SSS Boss Tells Court,” ThisDayLive, April 4, 2012.62

Imam Imam, “Jos Bombings - Group Claims Responsibility,” ThisDay, December 27, 2010.63

Slain Boko Haram leader Muhammad Yusuf’s family said in 2011 that 40% of the sect’s funding comes from outside Nigeria. See “Suspects Charged in Nigeria Bomb Responsibility,” al-Jazeera, December 25, 2011.64


The attack in Abuja mirrored AQIM’s attacks the next day against Algeria’s premier military academy at Cherchell on August 27, 2011, and also AQIM’s attack on the UN Headquarters in Algiers in 2007 and al-Qa’ida in Iraq’s (AQI) attack on the UN Headquarters in Baghdad in 2003. The attack in Abuja was an anomaly to the Shekau faction’s targeting strategy, in which interna...
and Niger confirmed that increasing numbers of Boko Haram members were receiving weapons from AQIM and traveling to Niger for training with AQIM.62

AQIM’s support may have helped Boko Haram evolve from a Taliban-inspired religious movement under Yusuf into a full-fledged militant movement under Shekau. There were several factors, however, that likely compelled AQIM to coordinate kidnapping operations in Nigeria with Ansaru, rather than with Boko Haram.

First, Boko Haram has always said that it does not carry out kidnappings and, at least until February 2013, did not carry out kidnappings or target Western personnel or institutions—with the exception of the attack on the UN Headquarters in Abuja in August 2011.63 This would have made it difficult for Belmokhtar to coordinate with Boko Haram since his operations almost exclusively targeted Western personnel and facilities.

Second, Boko Haram was based in northeastern Nigeria’s Borno State, which borders Niger but is more than 1,000 miles from northern Mali, where some of AQIM’s brigades were based. In contrast, Ansaru was based in northwestern Nigeria, which is only 300 miles from Mali.64 This suggests

that Ansaru was in closer operational range to AQIM and Belmokhtar’s militants. Ansaru may have also avoided establishing cells in northeastern Nigeria because Boko Haram threatened to kill defectors.65

Third, even when Boko Haram targeted churches and government offices, the casualties often included more Muslim civilians than Christians or government employees.66 This may have alienated

ern Kaduna in one week; Ansaru’s common references to Christian “massacres” of Muslims in Middle Belt cities (southern Kaduna was the scene of some of the worst post-election violence in 2011); Ansaru’s possible Hausa-Fulani composition, which are ethnic groups that have come into frequent conflict with Christians in the Middle Belt; Ansaru’s attack on the Nigerian military convoy passing through Kogi State en route to a base in Kaduna from where the soldiers went to Mali; Ansaru’s connection to Kaduna-based Boko Haram Shura Council member Abu Muhammed in the Kebbi kidnapping in May 2011; and Ansaru’s possible following of Kaduna-based cleric, shaykh Ahmad Gumi, who has been Nigeria’s most vocal critic against the country’s military deployment to Mali. On the same day that Ansaru targeted the military convoy in Kogi, Gumi said in a sermon in Kaduna: “If the Christian leadership of Nigeria is plunging us into Mali for the same reason of hatred and prejudice against Islamists, this is the warning they should heed, because Islam is unconquerable...” See “Sheikh Again Defends His Stand On Troops Deployment To Mali,” Sahara Reporters, January 20, 2013; “Sixth militancy in Southern Kaduna Threaten Fulani Herdsmen, Give Seven Days Evacuation Notice,” Sahara Reporters, June 5, 2013; “Jama’atu Ansarul Muslimina fi Biladi Sudan threatens Southern Kaduna Militant Group, Akhwat Akwos,” Desert Herald, June 11, 2012.

65 Ansaru members may also have been ethnic Hausa-Fulanis from northwestern Nigeria who resented Borno-based and Kanuri-led Boko Haram. According to captured Boko Haram members, Abubakar Shekau, who is ethnically Kanuri, favored Kanuris of Borno State, whereas Hausas and Fulanis are predominant ethnic groups throughout the rest of northern Nigeria. See Yusuf Alli, “How Bombers are Chosen, by Boko Haram Suspect,” The Nation, February 9, 2012; “Boko Haram: Six Killed in Fictional Clash,” ThisDayLive, February 3, 2012.

66 Boko Haram’s coordinated attacks on government offices in Kano on January 20, 2012, killed 180 people, including more than 150 Muslim civilians. In addition, Boko Haram’s attacks on churches in Kaduna on Easter 2012 killed mostly Muslim motorcycle taxi riders, women, and children outside of the church. See “More Muslims are Killed than Christians - Joji, Arewa Chief,” Vanguard, May 13, 2012.

Conclusion

Even if France and its West African allies have driven AQIM out of northern Mali, Ansaru and Boko Haram are likely self-sustainable and able to continue attacks. Ansaru relies mostly on its proven kidnapping expertise, and Boko Haram on assassinations and attacks on soft targets.66 Both Ansaru and Boko Haram will also likely recruit militants who fought and obtained new skills from warfare in Mali. The Boko Haram attack on an army barracks in Monguno, Borno State, on March 3, 2013, in which the militants mounted weapons on four-wheel-drive vehicles, and the discovery of improvised fighting vehicles in a raid on a Boko Haram hideout in Maidauguri, Borno State, on March 9, 2012, suggest that Boko Haram has already learned new methods of fighting from the Islamist militants in Mali.70


68 “Barnawi, Kambar: Qaeda-linked Militants with Boko Haram Ties.”


An increase in the number of recruits from other West African countries or Nigerians with experience in Mali could also enable Ansaru and Boko Haram to carry out attacks or kidnappings in southern Nigeria or in Nigeria’s neighboring countries of Benin, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon in revenge for these countries’ support of the French-led intervention. Shekau’s personal exposure to the war in Mali or, if he did not take refuge in Gao, his contacts to militants who returned to Nigeria from Mali could cause him to adopt a more regional view of the insurgency.

Shekau’s approval of a Boko Haram cell’s kidnapping of a seven-member French family in northern Cameroon on February 19, 2013, shows that Shekau no longer prohibits targeting foreign interests and that some Boko Haram cells are shifting toward Ansaru’s strategy. Moreover, Shekau’s warning that Boko Haram will attack Cameroon if it continues to arrest Boko Haram members could signify an expansion of the insurgency while also deterring other countries, such as Niger and Chad, from cracking down on Boko Haram cells operating on their territory.

Finally, if Ansaru and Boko Haram are strained for resources as a result of AQIM’s retreat from northern Mali, the two groups may look past their differences and cooperate. Since Ansaru announced its formation in January 2012, Boko Haram has tried to distance itself from the perception that it kills Muslim civilians. Ansaru’s kidnapping in a Hausa and Arabic language video statement dated March 15, 2013, but released on March 18, 2013, in which he said, “We have a mission of establishing Shari`a in this country and the rest of the world. We are the ones holding hostage the seven French nationals because the leaders of Cameroon and Nigeria have also detained our brethren both women and children under dehumanizing conditions. These seven French people will not be released until when we see our detained brethren released...” While the kidnapping seems to contradict the Boko Haram spokesman’s claim after Ansaru’s first kidnapped that Boko Haram does not engage in hostage-taking, Boko Haram’s demands for prisoners, not money, in exchange for the French family is consistent with the spokesman’s statement that Boko Haram does not ask for ransoms. Shekau’s wife was also arrested in northern Nigeria in 2013, and Shekau’s demand for the release of imprisoned French Nationals, not money, in exchange for his wife, who the security forces may be keeping captive, is consistent with the spokesman’s claim after Ansaru’s first kidnapping that Boko Haram does not engage in hostage-taking, Boko Haram's demands for prisoners, not money, in exchange for the French family is consistent with the spokesman’s statement that Boko Haram does not ask for ransoms.


72 A March 1, 2013, video of Shekau that was distributed to journalists in northern Nigeria shows six camouflaged militants in a forest sitting with Shekau speaking in what seems to be the Kanuri language (not Hausa or Arabic). This contrasts with Boko Haram’s November 27, 2012, video, in which Shekau is training with militants in a desert and speaking in Arabic. This could signal that Shekau has returned to Borno State from northern Mali. In addition, in Boko Haram’s March 15, 2013, video, Shekau claimed to be standing next to weapons stolen from the Nigerian security forces during an attack on the Monguno army barracks on March 13, 2013, which, if true, would mean that he is likely in Borno State. See “Uncovered: Boko Haram Base Traced to Mali – Intelligence Report Identifies Training, Operational Base,” The Sun, October 27, 2012; “Shekau, Boko Haram Leader, Denies Ceasefire in Beheading Video,” Vanguard, March 6, 2013.

73 Abubakar Shekau claimed the kidnapping in a Hausa and Arabic language video statement dated March 15, 2013, but released on March 18, 2013, in which he said, “We have a mission of establishing Shari`a in this country and the rest of the world. We are the ones holding hostage the seven French nationals because the leaders of Cameroon and Nigeria have also detained our brethren both women and children under dehumanizing conditions. These seven French people will not be released until when we see our detained brethren released...” While the kidnapping seems to contradict the Boko Haram spokesman’s claim after Ansaru’s first kidnapped that Boko Haram does not engage in hostage-taking, Boko Haram’s demands for prisoners, not money, in exchange for the French family is consistent with the spokesman’s statement that Boko Haram does not ask for ransoms.

74 Ansaru’s kidnapping in a Hausa and Arabic language video statement dated March 15, 2013, but released on March 18, 2013, in which he said, “We have a mission of establishing Shari`a in this country and the rest of the world. We are the ones holding hostage the seven French nationals because the leaders of Cameroon and Nigeria have also detained our brethren both women and children under dehumanizing conditions. These seven French people will not be released until when we see our detained brethren released...” While the kidnapping seems to contradict the Boko Haram spokesman’s claim after Ansaru’s first kidnapped that Boko Haram does not engage in hostage-taking, Boko Haram’s demands for prisoners, not money, in exchange for the French family is consistent with the spokesman’s statement that Boko Haram does not ask for ransoms. Shekau’s wife was also arrested in northern Nigeria in 2013, and Shekau’s demand for the release of imprisoned French Nationals, not money, in exchange for his wife, who the security forces may be keeping captive, is consistent with the spokesman’s claim after Ansaru’s first kidnapping that Boko Haram does not engage in hostage-taking, Boko Haram’s demands for prisoners, not money, in exchange for the French family is consistent with the spokesman’s statement that Boko Haram does not ask for ransoms.

75 The father of the family that was kidnapped in northern Cameroon worked for an energy company in Yaounde, Cameroon, although it is not known whether this was merely a coincidence. If the father was targeted due to his occupation, this suggests that the kidnappers from Boko Haram followed Ansaru’s strategy to target foreign engineers, and that the kidnappers may have been tipped off, as was the case in other Ansaru kidnappings. Separately, a Boko Haram cell uncovered in Sokoto on March 13, 2013, in which Boko Haram Shura Council member Habibu Yusuf, also known as “Asalafi,” was captured, shows that Boko Haram cells are operating in Ansaru’s main area of operations in northwestern Nigeria. Similarly, Ansaru’s kidnapping in Bauchi State shows that Ansaru is operating in Boko Haram’s main area of operations in northeastern Nigeria. If, as reported, “Asalafi” was a follower of Khalid al-Barnawi, this could be another sign of collaboration and fluidity between Boko Haram and Ansaru members. See “FG Places N50m Bounty on Boko Haram Leader,” Punch NG, November 24, 2012; “How We Weakened Boko Haram, Killed Bomb Expert, Others By Thejirika,” Guardian [Lagos], March 16, 2013; “Nigeria: Taking the Hostage Road,” Africa Confidential, March 15, 2013; “Boko Haram, Ansaru Target Lagos, Others,” Punch NG, February 23, 2013.
AQIM’s Playbook in Mali

By Pascale C. Siegel

AN INTERNAL DOCUMENT recovered by the Associated Press in Timbuktu in January 2013 sheds new light on al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb’s (AQIM) strategy in northern Mali.1 The document was purportedly part of a confidential letter from Abdelmalek Droukdel (also known as Abu Mus’ab `Abd al-Wadud), the amir of AQIM, to his lieutenants in the Sahara and to the Islamist militant group Ansar Eddine’s2 leader, Iyad ag Ghaly (also known as Shaykh Abu Fadl).3 The document was not dated, but several references indicate that Droukdel may have authored the letter in early July 2012.4

The letter revealed a deep strategic fracture between AQIM’s leadership and its lieutenants on the ground, as Droukdel saw a military intervention as all but inevitable and therefore wanted to focus the group’s strategy on outliving it. The letter further highlighted major internal dysfunction between AQIM’s leadership and its subordinates in the Sahara. Finally, it showed a deep commitment to success and a worrisome plan for the future.

Strategic Disagreement

Droukdel’s letter revealed a fundamental strategic disagreement both with his own operators and with Ansar Eddine in northern Mali. For Droukdel, AQIM must strive to retain its base and freedom of operation in northern Mali, or, as he wrote, to “gain a region under control and a people fighting for us and a refuge for our members that allows us to move forward with our program”5 even though it is “very probable, perhaps certain, that a military intervention will occur, whether directly or indirectly.”6

Droukdel believed that AQIM’s primary concern should be to outline a Western-backed intervention by cultivating enough local support so that it could blossom again after the military operation concluded. “If we can achieve this positive thing even in limited amount, then, even if the project fails later it will be just enough that we will have planted the first, good seeds, in a fertile soil and put pesticides and fertilizer on it, so that the tree will grow more quickly,” he wrote.7

On the basis of his strategic assessment, Droukdel contended that the tactics developed and implemented by his lieutenants in northern Mali—Nabil Makhloufi (amir of the Sahara region), Abu Zeid (amir of the Brigades of Tariq Ibn Ziyad), and Mokhtar Belmokhtar (amir of the Veiled Brigades)—and the policies pursued by Ansar Eddine were wrong and would lead to failure. He strongly criticized every major decision his lieutenants have made since taking over northern Mali. He argued that:

1. The declaration of an “Islamic State of Azawad” was premature because “establishing a just Islamic regime ruling people by the Shari`a of the People’s Lord is [a] very big duty that exceeds the capabilities of any organization or movement [now operating in Azawad].”8

2. The “extreme speed with which you applied Shari`a Law...in an environment ignorant of religion” was “wrong,”

because “our previous experience9 proved that applying Shari`a this way, without taking into account the environment into consideration will lead to people rejecting religion and engender hatred toward the mujahidin.”10

3. The destruction of the Timbuktu shrines11 will lead to “negative repercussions” because “internally we are not strong and there is a potential for an external intervention.”12

4. The application of “the hadd (religious punishment)...and the fact that you prevented women from getting out and children from playing, and searched the houses of the population...[are] contradictory to the policy of Salaf (our forebearers).”13

5. “The decision to go to war with the MNLA [National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad],” after becoming close and almost completing a deal with them, which we thought would be positive, is a major mistake.”15

It is unclear to which “previous experience” Droukdel was referring. He may have been referring to the experience of the Algerian civil war (1992-2002) where the Islamists’ violent excesses fueled popular discontent against them and enabled the Algerian government to significantly degrade their capabilities. He also may have been referring to the experience of al-Qa’ida in Iraq (AQI) between 2003 and 2008, where the group’s tactics led Sunni Arab leaders to distance themselves from AQI and cooperate with the United States to curb the group’s power.

1 “Mali-Al-Qaida’s Sahara Playbook,” p. 5.

2 In early July 2012, Ansar Eddine began the destruction of several 15th century mausoleums and shrines, including the tombs of Sidi Mahmoud, Sidi Moctar, and Alpha Moya in Timbuktu. The shrines are part of the UNESCO world heritage sites. Their destruction provoked international outrage. See Isahaq Tharoor, “Timbuktu’s Destruction: Why Islamists are Wrecking Mali’s Cultural Heritage,” Time, July 2, 2012.

13 Ibid.

14 The MNLA is a Tuareg nationalist-sectar political-military movement located in northern Mali, seeking the independence of northern Mali (Azawad). Tuaregs have long been disgruntled with the government of Bamako and have regularly rebelled against the central government. The latest offensive, initiated by the MNLA in January 2012, led to the overthrow of the Bamako government in March 2012.


1 For the original document in Arabic with the Associated Press’ English translation, see “Mali-Al-Qaida’s Sahara Playbook,” Associated Press, undated, available at www.apne.ws/YuuVAC. Also see Rukmini Callimachi, “In Timbuktu, Al-Qaida Left Behind a Manifesto,” Associated Press, February 14, 2013.

2 Ansar Eddine, which means “Defenders of the Faith,” is a homegrown Islamist movement led by renowned Tuareg rebel leader Iyad ag Ghaly. The group seeks to impose a stringent version of Shari`a across Mali and does not purport to have global jihadist ambitions.

3 Professor Matthieu Guidère, an AQIM specialist at the University of Toulouse in France, authenticated the document. Based on the language used and the reference system included in the material, he assessed the document to be legitimate.

4 The letter referred to the destruction of the Timbuktu shrines, which took place on June 30 and July 1, 2012. It also referred to Ansar Eddine’s decision to go to war with the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), which took place in June 2012. Lastly, it mentioned the fighting between the MNLA and Ansar Eddine in the present tense, yet by July 17, 2012, the MNLA had fled all major cities, thereby indicating that the letter was probably written before July 17.

5 “Mali-Al-Qaida’s Sahara Playbook.”

6 Ibid., p. 3.

7 Ibid., p. 4.

8 Ibid., p. 9.
Organizational Dysfunction

It was not the first time that Droukdel argued for a “gentler, kinder” AQIM. He made similar statements in a short audio message released on May 23, 2012. In that speech, he boasted that Mali offered a “historic opportunity” to establish an Islamic state, but also warned that such opportunity might be wasted if the wrong policies were implemented. He then advised his lieutenants to “gradually introduce Shari’a laws, not hasten to punish people, provide security and services, and consult elders and leaders amongst the people.”

“Droukdel believed that AQIM’s primary concern should be to outlive a Western-backed intervention by cultivating enough local support so that it could blossom again after the military operation concluded.”

Droukdel’s lieutenants and allies in the Sahara must not have felt bound by his advice, and instead acted in contradiction with their hierarchy’s wishes. On May 26, 2012, the MNLA and Ansar Eddine announced the breakaway Islamic State of Azawad. A week later, fighting began between the MNLA and Islamist factions allied with Ansar Eddine. Shari’a tribunals were quickly established and began dispensing harsh punishments such as amputating limbs for crimes of theft. Finally, in late June and early July, the Islamists destroyed ancient Islamic Sufi shrines in Timbuktu because they depicted “false idols.”

Droukdel did not conceal his frustration when he castigated his subordinates for providing unconvincing explanations through media channels, rather than through internal channels, for these actions. He wrote: “And with all the reasons our brother gave via their statements through the media (we have not until now received any clarification from you despite how perilous the operation was!), we can see that all these reasons are not good enough to declare a war [against the MNLA].” It is unclear whether Droukdel was angry because his subordinates were not heeding his advice or because of the technical difficulties in communicating effectively between northern Mali and Kabylia, the mountainous region to the east of Algiers where he is believed to be based, due to security forces’ surveillance efforts. Both issues could be factors.

Relations have always been difficult between Droukdel, whose operational base is in Kabylia, and the amirs operating in the Algerian south and the Sahel who have been fairly independent. In August 2012, for example, Droukdel mandated Necib Tayeb, head of AQIM’s judicial committee, to conduct a reconciliation mission between the three AQIM leaders in the Sahara at the time: Abu Zeid, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, and Nabil Makhloufi. According to the Algerian Press Service, his mission was to “unite the amirs of AQMI [AQIM] in the Sahel... to end the differences and conflicts that have opposed the southern branches to the northern branches.” His mission failed, however, as the Algerian police intercepted Tayeb in Ghardaïa on his way to Mali. After the failed mission, Droukdel reportedly dismissed Mokhtar Belmokhtar from his position. At the time, AQIM sources cited in the Mauritanian press indicated that Belmokhtar had been fired for not abiding by the leadership’s decisions and recommendations. Although neither Belmokhtar nor Droukdel have publicly tied his dismissal specifically to the strategic disagreements over Mali, those concerns possibly weighed on Droukdel’s decision.

Proposed Alternative Policy

In addition to his stern criticisms and disapproval of the current strategy pursued by his lieutenants and allies, Droukdel reiterated his call for a different vision and policy. To make the most of this historic opportunity, Droukdel recommended the time-tested al-Qa`ida strategy of co-opting local grievances and advised his subordinates to adopt a flexible strategy of alliances. Throughout his letter, Droukdel wrote about the value of “lessons learned” and extolled the virtues of adapting to local circumstances. In the Mali context, showing flexibility translated into seeking an alliance with all of the organizations that represent Azawad society, including Ansar Eddine and the MNLA. It is time, he wrote, to extend bridges to the various sectors and parts of Azawad society—Arab and Tuaregs and Zingiya (Blacks)—to end the situation of political and social and intellectual separation between the mujahidin and these sectors, particularly the big tribes, and the main rebel movements with their various ideologies, and the elite of Azawad society, its clerics, its groupings, its individuals, and its noble forces.

Droukdel suggested an alliance of convenience to combine forces to gain widespread support as well as share the risk with partners. He explained that this will have three fundamental benefits. First, we would not alone bear the fault of the possible failure.

16 “AQIM Congratulates Ansar al-Din for Conquests in Azawad, Cautions it to Avoid Clashes with the MNLA,” Sahara Media, May 21, 2012.
17 Ibid.
20 Tharoor.
21 “Mali-Al-Qa`ida’s Sahara Playbook,” p. 8.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Mokhtar Belmokhtar claimed responsibility for the January 17, 2013, brazen attack against the BP gas complex at In Amenas in eastern Algeria. In a video communiqué signed by “Those Who Sign With Blood,” the brigade that Belmokhtar created in December 2012 after being fired by Droukdel, he claimed responsibility for the operation in the name of al-Qa’ida central: “We, at al-Qa’ida, are responsible for this blessed operation.” He made no reference to Droukdel or AQIM, positioning himself as a rival to AQIM. See “Belouar dans un nouvel enregistrement: ‘Nous sommes prêts à négocier avec l’Algérie et l’Occident à condition que cesse la guerre au Mali,’” Sahara Media, January 20, 2013.
28 “Mali-Al-Qa`ida’s Sahara Playbook,” p. 3.
and the expected blockade. Rather if it happens—God forbid though it is very probable—all the main parties would bear responsibility before the people and everyone will consider the matter objectively and responsibility. Second, administration of the region and standing up to the international, foreign, and regional challenge is a large duty that exceeds our military and financial and structural capability for the time being. So it is wise then for us not to bear the burden alone in this phase.29

He further preached a policy of moderation and accommodation designed to win over the people. “And a wise policy in this stage is not to push people away and make sure to integrate everybody,” he said.30 Practically, Droukdel recommended proceeding cautiously with the following policies:

1. Put aside rivalries with other movements, including Ansar Eddine and the MNLA and work toward a peace deal with the MNLA.31
2. Seek full integration of AQIM’s fighters into Azawad’s civil (tribes) and political (movements) society.32
3. Proselytize al-Qa’ida’s version of Islam to local populations.33
4. Adopt a moderate rhetoric that reassures and calms and avoid provocations and repeated threats.34
5. Downplay the al-Qa’idist, jihadist nature while playing up the local nature of the movement.35
6. Stay away from declaring or enforcing takfir (excommunicating Muslims).36

These policies are designed to advance AQIM’s goals in pursuit of the global jihad. Droukdel readily admitted that the creation of an Islamic state in Azawad posed a “true dilemma,” changed the nature of AQIM’s activity in Azawad, and required the establishment of a “new framework regulating the organizations’ relationship,” in particular between AQIM and Ansar Eddine.37 He showed flexibility in the way he envisioned relations with Ansar Eddine. Droukdel proposed two organizational frameworks, one in which AQIM’s operations in northern Mali would be under Ansar Eddine’s command-and-control and another in which AQIM would “loan” fighters to Ansar Eddine for its operations in northern Mali.38 These fighters would be under the command of Ansar Eddine and gain citizenship in the country of Azawad.39

Droukdel’s proposal, however, made it clear that of the radical Islamist organizations operating in Mali, AQIM was the one in charge of international operations. Under both scenarios, Ansar Eddine would be confined to operations in northern Mali, whereas AQIM would operate internationally.40 Droukdel was the artisan of the rapprochement between the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) and al-Qa’ida in 2006, which resulted in the creation of AQIM in 2007. He is the one who successfully transformed the GSPC from an Algerian movement focused on local grievances into a global movement ideologically and doctrinally aligned with al-Qa’ida, dedicated to establishing a worldwide Islamic caliphate and focused on attacking the far enemy (e.g., the West).41 These two scenarios indicate that AQIM is more interested in pursuing the global jihad than ruling Azawad. They also show, however, that AQIM’s leadership is also willing and capable of adapting to new circumstances and exploiting them for the mutual benefit of both organizations.

Conclusion
As the French-led military forces retake northern Mali, Droukdel’s eight month old letter should resonate as an ominous warning as it points to a long-term strategic plan to outlive the intervention and sets the stage for a potentially successful return. Clearly, under Droukdel’s leadership, AQIM has no intention of relinquishing northern Mali.

The French-led intervention and its immediate aftermath appear to validate at least part of Droukdel’s analysis. The MNLA turned against its former allies and picked up arms to fight alongside the intervening force, while scenes of popular elation in Gao and Timbuktu showed that the jihadists’ harsh rule antagonized many.42 Yet there are two reasons why AQIM might get a second chance at implementing its plan for the country.

First, the disruption of AQIM’s networks in the Sahara, including the confirmed death of Abu Zeid and the uncertain fate of Mokhtar Belmokhtar, might give Droukdel an opening to reshape the regional leadership with more obedient commanders who might implement his policies.43

Second, if the international community is unable to address the deep grievances that led to the rebellion in 2012, resentment may allow for the return of AQIM-linked fighters.

Pascale Combelles Siegel runs Insight Through Analysis, a consultancy firm specializing in strategic influence in support of peace, stabilization, and counterterrorism operations. She monitors political unrest in the Middle East, North and West Africa, with a focus on al-Qa’ida. Before that, she analyzed local perceptions of social, political, and military issues in Iraq and Afghanistan. Ms. Siegel also analyzed Iraqi insurgent propaganda for the U.S. Army, where she participated in the design of a “Divide and Prosper” communication campaign concept for the U.S. government.

29 Ibid., p. 4.
30 Ibid., p. 10.
31 Ibid., p. 7.
32 Ibid., p. 4.
33 Ibid., p. 5.
34 Ibid., p. 9.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., p. 10.
37 Ibid., p. 6.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
Al-Shabab’s Tactical and Media Strategies in the Wake of its Battlefield Setbacks

By Christopher Anzalone

In 2009-2010, the Somali militant group al-Shabab controlled most of central and southern Somalia south of the autonomous region of Puntland. Since the February 2011 military offensives by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), Somali government troops, and Somali Sufi militia forces, al-Shabab has suffered a series of significant territorial and strategic setbacks. Pressures on the insurgent movement increased when Kenya and Ethiopia, together with client Somali militias, invaded its southern and western strongholds in October and November 2011. The Kenyan military’s goal from the onset of its campaign inside Somalia was to seize the vital port city of Kismayo, one of al-Shabab’s most important economic centers. Kenya seized control of that city in October 2012. Ethiopian troops and their Somali allies quickly captured the Ethiopia-Somalia border town of Beledweyne, and within two months had also captured the city of Baidoa in western Somalia.

These setbacks necessitated a shift in al-Shabab’s military strategy. This article assesses the trajectory of both al-Shabab’s military and political strategies, explains how defections have weakened the group, and reviews its information and media operations during the past two years in the midst of its relatively rapid territorial losses.

Pressure on Three Fronts: North, South and West

Al-Shabab, bolstered by initial military victories and the continued corruption and ineptness plaguing the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG), launched major frontline assaults against AMISOM and TFG positions in the divided city of Mogadishu in August 2010 during its “Ramadan Offensive.” Its offensive failed, however, resulting in heavy insurgent losses and the inability to capture the areas of Mogadishu under AMISOM and TFG control. A second “Ramadan Offensive” launched one year later could not turn the tide in al-Shabab’s favor. By mid-August 2011, al-Shabab had announced a “strategic withdrawal” from Mogadishu and began a guerilla war in the city against AMISOM and the TFG.

Despite having withdrawn most of its forces from the capital, al-Shabab operated in outlying districts and exerted influence within Mogadishu. It also continued to execute deadly attacks deep inside the city, including vehicle bombings at the Somali Ministry of Education and a military base in October 2011. Al-Shabab’s persistent ability to send insurgents and suicide bombers into the city did not stop AMISOM and TFG forces from capturing its bases in Mogadishu’s northern outskirts. The city and the surrounding districts, however, would not fully fall to AMISOM and the TFG until four months later when they captured the Suuqa Hoolaha neighborhood in north Mogadishu in March 2012.

In late November 2011, Ethiopian troops entered western Somalia with the goal of pushing back al-Shabab forces from its border. The re-entry of the Ethiopian military into the country opened a third front, to the west, against al-Shabab, which was already faced with offensives by AMISOM and the TFG in the north and Kenya and its militia allies in the south. In addition to battlefield setbacks, al-Shabab was faced with renewed pressure on its economic resources. Having lost the Bakara Market in Mogadishu in August 2011, the insurgents suffered from Kenya targeting their logistical and economic networks in the south, where it received significant revenues from taxing local merchants and traders as well as from the trade in charcoal around the Horn of Africa and the Arab Gulf states.

Kenya, citing the increased number of kidnappings carried out in its territory close to the border with Somalia, sent military forces inside the Juba region of southern Somalia in mid-October 2011. The Kenyan government also launched a major security sweep in the Eastleigh district of its own capital, Nairobi, targeting suspected al-Shabab “sympathizers.”

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For a political map of Somalia showing territorial control in March 2010, see http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9f/Somalia_map_states_regions_districts.png.

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5 Ibid.


13 “Kenya to Target al-Shabab Sympathisers in Nairobi,” BBC, October 20, 2011.


Continuity with the Past: Refocusing on Guerrilla Warfare

Shortly after al-Shabab’s “strategic withdrawal” from Mogadishu in August 2011, Hasan Dahir Aweys, who was then a member of al-Shabab’s leadership, said in an interview with Somali Channel that the movement would adopt a guerrilla warfare strategy since it was unable to match AMISOM’s military superiority.17 Instead of continuing to launch massive and costly frontline assaults on enemy positions, al-Shabab’s frontline fighting force, Jaysh al-`Usra (Army of Hardship/Difficulty), has since focused primarily on launching hit-and-run style attacks on AMISOM, TFG/Somali government, Kenyan, and Ethiopian forces and their allies.

Rather than make a “final stand” in Mogadishu, Beledweyne, Baidoa, and other strategic urban centers, al-Shabab withdrew from these cities without offering much resistance, although it promised to continue operating militarily in these areas.18 Facing defections, al-Shabab chose to save their always limited number of fighters for a protracted guerrilla war.19 It refocused its military strategy on executing guerrilla-style attacks on enemy checkpoints and other positions and planting improvised explosive devices in supposedly “liberated” areas under AMISOM, Somali government, Kenyan, and Ethiopian control.20 A primary insurgent target, in addition to non-Somali and Somali government forces, were al-Shabab’s militia enemies such as the Somali Sufi fighters of Ahlu-Sunna wal-Jama (People of the Prophetic Tradition) umbrella group, who are labeled “apostates” in al-Shabab’s written statements, videos, radio broadcasts, and other media productions.21

Assassinations of enemy military officers, militia commanders, and Somali government officials have long been an important staple in al-Shabab’s military strategy, and the movement continues to target such officials with varying degrees of success.22 In May 2012, an al-Shabab ambush tried unsuccessfully to assassinate Somali President Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmad in the Afgooye corridor south of Mogadishu.23 Such assassinations, while they cannot turn the tide of battle in al-Shabab’s favor, are capable of disrupting enemy forces and preventing the transition to a more stable security and political environment in areas recently liberated from insurgent control. Spies remain a concern for al-Shabab, particularly as it began to lose increasing amounts of territory to its enemies. When captured, suspected spies were quickly executed.24 Similar guerrilla-style attacks were also frequently used by al-Shabab during 2007 and 2008, the first two years of its insurgency against Ethiopian forces, the TFG, and AMISOM.25

In May and June 2012, al-Shabab also reintroduced its “daily news report” format when releasing public statements. In its early years as an underground guerrilla movement, al-Shabab released groups of statements in this format, in which a number of its daily military actions and activities were briefly reported together in a single statement.26 This more simplified version of publishing allowed the insurgents to streamline the process of collecting and publishing their print statements, which made it easier to produce statements while engaging in a more covert insurgency. Whether this is because of new technological challenges is unknown.

Regardless, this shift shows continuity not only between al-Shabab’s military operations in the field, which have


22 Representative al-Shabab statements include: “Assassination of a Member of the Apostle Intelligence Services in Mogadishu,” March 1, 2012; “Martyrdom Operation Inside the Presidential Palace of the Apostle Government,” March 16, 2012; “Assassination of an Officer from the Apostle Militias in the District of Laba Daqah,” April 4, 2012; and “Killing a Burundian Officer in a Special Operation,” May 14, 2012.


26 In 2007, al-Shabab released a number of reports under the title “Harvest of the Jihad in Somalia” and in 2008 as part of two sustained military campaigns dubbed “No Peace without Islam” and “Our Terrorism is Praiseworthy.”
shifted back to the movement’s underground guerrilla roots, but also in its media operations.

Defections
As its fortunes began to turn during the summer of 2011, al-Shabab was faced with an increasing number of defections, which continued into 2012.27 Exact numbers of defectors, from those who surrendered directly to AMISOM and the Somali government to those who simply abandoned their posts, are not available. Both Somali and foreign media outlets have, however, reported on hundreds of al-Shabab fighters surrendering.28 Defections impacted its ability to respond militarily to offensives by AMISOM, Somali government, Kenyan and Ethiopian troops, and anti-Shabab militias.

In September 2012, al-Shabab suffered defections from at least a segment of Hisbul Islamiyya, a once independent, more Somalia-focused guerrilla group fighting against AMISOM and the TFG. Hisbul Islamiyya was forced to merge with al-Shabab in December 2010 after losing to it militarily on the battlefield in a conflict that lasted throughout that year.29 A reported Kenya-based Hisbul Islamiyya spokesman, Muhammad Mu’allim, recently told reporters that his group’s past allegiance to al-Shabab had been forced and was “by mouth only,” and that al-Shabab’s rapidly declining power allowed them to break free. He said that Hisbul Islamiyya was open to negotiations over the future of Somalia.30 Attempting to put an end to these reports, al-Shabab responded rapidly with a written statement from its military spokesman, Abu Mus’ab. He denied that Mu’allim was an active member of Hisbul Islamiyya, claiming that he had “escaped” to Kenya when the group joined ranks with al-Shabab.31

Al-Shabab was also forced to deal in a public fashion with the separation of Omar Hammami (also known as Abu Mansur al-Amriki), once the insurgents’ most recognizable foreign fighter. After briefly denying his initial March 2012 claim that al-Shabab threatened his life due to “differences” over matters of “Shari’a and strategy,” al-Shabab had to address Hammami’s claims more forcefully when the American continued to make allegations against them in the first part of his autobiography, which was released in May 2012, and in a second video posted to YouTube in which he alleged that al-Shabab treated foreign fighters poorly.32 Hammami also made active use of his Twitter spokesman “Abu American,” who many analysts suspect is actually Hammami himself, in launching allegations against al-Shabab and its allies.33

Al-Shabab, in a lengthy official statement released in December 2012, denied Hammami’s many allegations and said that he “does not, in any way, shape, or form, represent the views” of foreign fighters in Somalia.34 They further labeled Hammami a narcissist interested in public attention and acclaim.35 Al-Shabab also denied the frequent reports in Western media that Hammami was a “grand strategist, recruiter and fundraiser” for the group. They accused Hammami

“As its fortunes began to turn during the summer of 2011, al-Shabab was faced with an increasing number of defections.”

perhaps in part to counter Hammami’s allegations with regard to foreign fighters, al-Shabab’s media department, the al-Kataib Media Foundation, released the third installment of its martyrrology video series “Profit of the Sale” on February 1, 2013. The video identified a number of al-Shabab martyrs, including the late British-Lebanese fighter Bilal al-Berjawi, who was killed in a reported U.S. drone strike in January 2012.38 Featuring al-Berjawi so prominently in a major video may have been an attempt by al-Shabab to counter these rumors.39

Shaab, December 18, 2012. 35 Ibid. 36 Ibid. 37 Mujahidin Moments, al-Shabab, February 2013. The video features Swahili-speaking foreign fighters in addition to Abu Ahmad al-Amriki. 38 Ian Cobain, “British ‘al-Qaida Member’ Killed in US Drone Attack in Somalia,” Guardian, January 22, 2012. 39 That being said, al-Berjawi was allegedly involved in a power struggle with al-Shabab’s amir, Ahmed Godane (also known as Mukhtar Abu al-Zubayr), and was

“As al-Shabab lost territory in the south and west, its media department released a series of videos documenting the movement’s past and present implementation of law and order over previously bandit and thief infested parts of the country.”

31 “Statement Regarding the Conference in which it was Announced that Hisbul Islam Withdrawed from the Union with Harkat al-Shabab al-Mujahideen,” al-Shabab, September 28, 2012.
33 Ibid.
34 “Abu Mansur al-Amriki: A Candid Clarification,” al-

of spreading societal discord (fitna) at a time of great trial for the mujahidin and other Muslims in Somalia.36 Hammami was replaced by a different English-speaking foreign fighter, Abu Ahmad al-Amriki, in another video dedicated to the group’s foreign fighters.37

Highlighting the Benefits of Insurgent Rule

As al-Shabab lost territory in the south and west, its media department released a series of videos documenting the movement’s past and present implementation of law and order over previously bandit and thief infested parts of the country. Al-Shabab also claimed to have completed a number of new public works projects despite its battlefield setbacks. These projects included the construction of roads and bridges and the distribution of aid to the needy. Al-Shabab also released videos in which Somali civilians discussed their happiness with insurgent rule and concern over the return of foreign troops and their Somali “lackeys.” In addition to these projects, al-Shabab undertook other public works initiatives including agricultural programs, opening centers for people with special needs, restoring dams, and distributing food aid.

In a major video production titled Under the Shade of Shari‘a, an English-speaking al-Shabab “journalist” recounted his 2011 trip to the city of Baidoa in western Somalia. Contrasting the period of insurgent rule in the city to the days of corruption during the tenure of the TFG, he and al-Kataib cameramen went to great lengths to show the economic benefits allegedly brought to the city by al-Shabab’s implementation of its interpretation of Shari‘a. The video included extensive footage of a meeting held in 2011 near Baidoa between al-Shabab leaders, including spokesman ‘Ali Rage, and clan leaders, possibly from the Rahanweyn clan group, which predominates in that area. Locals and clan leaders interviewed for the video said that they welcomed insurgent rule since it brought stability, which in turn allowed for the rejuvenation of the economy and increased safety for residents. During celebrations in Kismayo organized by al-Shabab to mark the formalization of its affiliation with al-Qa‘ida in early February 2012, a local clan leader from Juba, Isma’il Harun, praised the “mujahidin” when he appeared alongside al-Shabab’s governor of Kismayo, Hasan Ya‘qub, and political bureau official Hussein ‘Ali Fiidow. The locations of al-Shabab’s official celebrations following the formalization of its alliance with al-Qa‘ida were chosen for their symbolic political and propaganda value. Despite AMISOM’s advance beyond Mogadishu and the Kenyans’ drive toward Kismayo, the insurgent movement hosted large celebrations in Kismayo, Baidoa and Lafoole, which were attended by a number of its senior leaders, including Rage, Ya‘qub, Fiidow, and ‘Abd al-Qadir Mu’min. Less than a month later, Baidoa fell to Ethiopian forces, and Kenya took control of Kismayo in October. In late August 2011, al-Shabab made similar political statements with its choices for locations of communal Eid al-Fitr prayers. One gathering was held in the outskirts of Mogadishu despite the insurgents’ withdrawal from most of the city earlier that month.

Broadcasting its ability to continue governing has been a priority for al-Shabab even as its setbacks mounted during the past two years. It has continued to organize programs aimed at training preachers and educating merchants and craftsmen as well as distributing aid. The group has also continued to focus on pushing forward an education program in areas under its control that conforms to its rigid interpretation of Islam.

Insurgent outreach to the country’s powerful clans continues, and al-Shabab claims to have received support from a number of clan leaders from the Huber, Gaaljecel and Rahanweyn, as well as other clans and sub-clans. Insurgent officials have also sought to mediate clan disputes and hold localized Shari‘a court sessions aimed at resolving disagreements between locals and complaints against al-Shabab itself.

Conclusion

Al-Shabab, in the midst of battlefield defeats and political setbacks, has sought over the past year to respond militarily while continuing to assert its claim to political legitimacy as an insurgent governing authority. It has shifted back to guerrilla tactics and has adopted a more flexible form of collecting and releasing reports from the frontlines. It has continued its attempts to exercise governing authority over areas under its control as well as highlighting small and medium scale public works projects, although this has become increasingly difficult with its loss of the major urban centers.

Despite these setbacks, al-Shabab’s leaders and media operatives understand that, to a significant degree, the appearance of power can be nearly as effective as actual power. Therefore, they have a keen interest in maintaining the ability to project the image of a movement that is both well-rooted in local social structures and capable of launching regular, successful attacks against its enemies—both domestic and foreign.

Christopher Anzalone is a doctoral student in the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University where he studies modern Muslim sociopolitical movements, including transnational jihadist groups, Shi'a Islam, and Islamist visual cultures.

The Upcoming Peace Talks in Southern Thailand’s Insurgency

By Zachary Abuza

Since 2004, insurgents in southern Thailand have fought to achieve an independent state for the region’s 1.8 million Muslim ethnic Malays. The conflict, which is the most lethal in Southeast Asia today, has left approximately 5,500 people dead and nearly 10,000 wounded.1 Although it has settled into a stalemate, a recent political development has given rise to hope that peace is possible. On February 28, 2013, the chairman of the Thai National Security Council (NSC), Lieutenant-General Parador Pattanatabut, and a representative of the separatist Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), Ustaz Hassan Taib, signed an agreement to begin formal peace talks.2 The agreement, which garnered significant media attention, was the result of Malaysian3 mediation following nearly a year of back-channel talks that were started by ousted Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, the brother of current Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra.4

While there have been various attempts to negotiate an end to the conflict in southern Thailand since 2004, this marks the first time that there has been optimism that the talks between the Royal Thai Government and the shadowy insurgents will achieve progress. There are many reasons to question this optimism, however. The Royal Thai Army (RTA) chief, General Prayuth Chan-ocha, and many analysts have expressed skepticism that Taib and the BRN have any command-and-control over the horizontal network of insurgents.5 Moreover, few political analysts see any meaningful concessions from the government on the issues of devolution of power and autonomy. Nonetheless, this marks the first time that a Thai administration has been willing to publicly commit itself to the notion that the conflict can only be resolved through the implementation of meaningful political reforms. Although the talks may not result in a durable peace immediately, they do lay the foundation for a negotiated political agreement.

This article provides background on the insurgency in southern Thailand, examines the recent political agreement, and then explains how the negotiations will likely proceed.

Background

The current iteration of the insurgency in southern Thailand is now in its 10th year, although the origin of the insurgency dates back to the 1909 Anglo-Siamese Treaty that demarcated the border between Thailand and Malaysia and left three provinces, of which 80% of the population is comprised of Muslim Malays, in Thailand— Narathiwat, Yala and Pattani. Thailand spent much of the century trying to assimilate the Malay into Buddhist Thai society. Low-level insurgencies smoldered from the early-1970s to the mid-1990s, yet the insurgents were divided on ideological grounds (ethno-nationalists, Islamists, or those tied to the Malayan Communist Party) and differences over their ultimate political

1 The majority of the statistics in this article are drawn from the author’s incident database. The author’s data is based on open source reporting and as such is lower than official figures; not all casualties are reported in the media, and many people reported as wounded later die. The author indicates when official data is used. The author does not have access to official data on a regular basis, and when he does it tends to be aggregate numbers. By carefully coding open source data, the author was able to do much more detailed statistical analysis on victim types, location of attacks, trends in how people were killed, size of improvised explosive devices, and more. This database will henceforth be cited as “Abuza, Incident Database.” Also, for confirmation of the number of casualties since 2004, see “Bomb Kills Two, Wounds 12 in Thai South,” Agence France-Presse, March 2, 2013.
2 The text of the agreement can be found at “Text of the Agreement between Thailand and the BRN,” Bangkok Post, February 28, 2013.
3 The role of Malaysia in the negotiations is important, since the insurgents in southern Thailand allegedly stage some of their attacks from across the border in Malaysia. For more on Malaysia’s role, see “Malaysia to Assist Dialogue Process for Peace in Southern Thailand,” Thai News Agency, March 1, 2013.
5 The insurgent movement is spread across three-and-a-half provinces in southern Thailand. Beneath the field commanders (muqade) are fairly autonomous cells. There is no evidence that it is a “top-down” insurgency. See “Deep South Attacks Won’t Cease: Prayuth,” The Nation, March 4, 2013.
objectives (independence, union with Malaysia or autonomy).

Violence during this period remained in the countryside, and insurgents rarely targeted civilians. The Thai government exploited the insurgents’ inability to work together, and quelled the insurgency by the mid-1990s through a mixture of general amnesties, economic development programs, burgeoning economic growth on both sides of the border, and the establishment of a durable interagency institution, the Southern Border Province Administrative Committee (SBPAC). While moderate and more mainstream dissident groups such as the Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO) accepted amnesty and surrendered in large numbers, by the mid-1990s hardliners went underground where they indoctrinated and recruited a new generation of insurgents.

The insurgency that erupted in January 2004 is both quantitatively and qualitatively different than its predecessors. While it began at a low level, the movement grew following the implementation of a series of failed counterinsurgency policies, while the Thai government remained largely in denial about the insurgents’ goals.

Violence peaked in mid-2007, when the Thai army surged the region with some 60,000 troops, and the number of incidents and casualties fell steadily through the first half of 2008. Yet by the end of 2008, violent incidents had risen. Since January 2009, the violence has remained steady. Between January 2009 and February 2013, an estimated 1,473 people have been killed and 3,241 have been wounded, an average of approximately 30 deaths per month and 65 wounded per month. The victims since the start of 2009 include approximately 118 soldiers, 68 police, 227 rangers and defense volunteers, 128 village headmen or their deputies, 885 civilians, 39 teachers and four monks. Security forces including RTA regulars, police, paramilitary rangers and village defense volunteers represent 28% of those killed and 38% of those wounded since 2009. Approximately 158 teachers have been killed, a category of targets that puts additional pressure on the Thai state as they lead to prolonged closures of schools. There have been more than 40 beheadings, including the most recent one in August 2012.

While most of those killed are the victims of shootings, since January 2009 there have been 595 improvised explosive device (IED) attacks, an average of 12 per month. Most IEDs are small, in the 11 pound range, although 50-100 pound IEDs are not unusual. IEDs are typically hidden alongside or buried under the road to target passing security details, although they are frequently employed in the cities, often concealed in motorcycles. Insurgents use grenades when they acquire them, and engage in frequent arson attacks. There have been no suicide bombers in southern Thailand.

While there are months where the violence spikes, the rate of violence is surprisingly consistent, as if the insurgents have calculated the appropriate frequency of attacks to assure their immediate goals of driving the Buddhist population out of the region and discrediting the government and weakening public institutions. To date, Thai security forces have been unable to stop the violence.

While the exact number of insurgents is unknown, in an August 2012 order of battle, the RTA estimated that there are 9,600 militants. According to open source reporting, there have been 127 insurgents killed and 315 captured since early 2009.

There are a number of insurgent organizations besides the BRN. The BRN-Coordinate (BRN-C), which split from the BRN in the 1980s, is a madrasa-based movement under the leadership of Masae Useng and Sapaeing Basor, to which much of the violence is attributed. The Gerakan Mujahidin Islam Pattani (GMIP) began as a gun smuggling group that supplied the Acehnese independence movement, the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM), and then became an extortion and enforcement arm for local politicians in southern Thailand. The group changed course when two of Thailand’s few veterans from the war in Afghanistan in the 1980s took command. Other cells emerged out of New-PULO. The media often reports on the Runda Kampulan Kecil (RKK), but this is inaccurate because there is no RKK “organization”—the RKK refers to small group guerrilla tactics that militants from groups such as the BRN-C acquired through training in Indonesia.

8 Abuza, Incident Database.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
Many insurgent leaflets and night letters are simply signed “Warriors of Pattani,” which highlights the horizontal nature of the insurgency. What is more important than the names of the groups is how they are organized. According to a Thai journalist, the

“Critically, two of the senior-most insurgents, Masae Useng and Sapaeing Basor, will send representatives to the talks.”

RTA said that there are approximately 35 regional commanders, known as juwae, who run operations at the district level. The RTA asserts that there are roughly 20 individuals above the juwae, who meet roughly every two months to set broad policy. This grouping, which includes members of many different organizations, is known as the Dewan Pimpinan Usat.

The Agreement
The February 28, 2013, agreement stated that the Thai government is “willing to engage in peace dialogue with people [the BRN] who have different opinions and ideologies from the state as one of the stakeholders in solving the Southern Border Provinces problem under the framework of the Thai Constitution while Malaysia would act as facilitator.”

This is a tacit acknowledgement that despite soaring military budgets since 2006—Bt3-4 billion ($110-135 million) for security operations in the south alone—large earmarks for development in the south, and some 60,000 security forces deployed in the deep south, the insurgency cannot be defeated militarily.

On the insurgents’ side, it may be an acknowledgement that violence is not bringing them closer to their desired goals. On September 14, 2012, a senior juwae, Wae Ali Copter Waeji, of the GMIP surrendered with 90 of his men, signing a letter in which they acknowledged that their current strategy (i.e., violence) was not achieving their objectives. While there have not been the subsequent mass defections from the insurgency that Thai authorities expected, that may have more to do with the fact that there is no blanket amnesty for those who surrender, and the Emergency Decree that governs most of the deep south gives authorities little discretion in dropping charges against suspects who have been indicted for particular acts of violence. Indeed, since September’s mass defection, only 13 insurgents have surrendered to authorities, according to Thai media reports.

Wae Ali Copter Waeji and two of the 90 who surrendered face criminal charges, while the others were forced into a six month re-education program run by the military. The deputy prime minister for security affairs at the time, General Yutthasak Sasipraya, acknowledged that the amnesty process needed to be amended if the government wanted to encourage defections, while 4th Army Commander Lieutenant General Udomchai Thammasororatch requested the Ministry of Justice formally amend the legal process and reduce or drop punishments of those who have surrendered. To date, no formal process has been amended, and therefore many insurgents are likely unwilling to surrender.

There is also a sense of hubris that could be prodding the insurgents to the table. Militants suffered their single worst loss since 2004 on February 13, 2013, when a group of 50-60 insurgents launched an attack on a Thai Marine base in Narathiwat Province’s Bacho district. The Marines expected the attack, as they recovered a map of their military base in the pocket of an insurgent that they had killed three days earlier. Sixteen militants were killed, and four were later arrested. Militants who once could attack at will are presently confronted by a more professional and better equipped security force whose counterinsurgency operations have improved in the past few years. By 2012, authorities had increased their security presence in the south, especially in the cities and along the major roads. As a result of increased patrols and checkpoints, insurgents do not have as much freedom of movement. Moreover, they have not staged mass simultaneous attacks, which were common at the height of the insurgency in the first half of 2007.

How Negotiations Will Proceed
Formal talks are set to begin on March 28, 2013. The Thai negotiators will be from the NSC headed by Lieutenant General Paradorn Pattanatabut. Malaysia has appointed Dato Sri Ahmad Zamzamin bin Hashim, the former director of the Malaysian External Intelligence Organization, as the facilitator. While Taib will represent the BRN, it is important to note that the Thai government acknowledges that the BRN is only one of many groups involved in the conflict. Indeed, the February 28 agreement described them as “one of the stakeholders.” To that end, the Thai side has encouraged the BRN to invite other stakeholders.

32 Ibid.
33 This observation is based on the author’s visit to Narathiwat, Yala and Pattani Provinces in southern Thailand in July 2012.
34 Ibid.
militants to the talks. To date, the BRN has not made their 15 person list public. The Thai NSC, however, announced that representatives from a total of nine groups will attend—the BRN, New PULO, PULO 88, BRN-Congress, BRN-C, Barisan Islam Pembangunan Pattani, as well as the GMIP, Gerakan Mujahidin Pattani and Ulama Pattani. Critically, two of the senior-most insurgents, Masae Useng and Sapaeing Basor, will send representatives to the talks.

There are a number of challenges going into the negotiations. The first is that violence has continued since the February 28 agreement. Based on open source reporting, in the 25 days following the agreement, there have been eight bombings, one grenade attack, and 20 separate shootings that left four police, four rangers, nine headmen, two village defense volunteers and six civilians dead. The RTA is concerned that the BRN has no command-and-control over local insurgent cells, with General Prayuth describing them as an “old-guard outfit.” The BRN split into three factions in the 1980s, and most of the current violence is perpetrated by the BRN-C and groups such as the GMIP. The NSC chief acknowledged this is a problem but spoke of the BRN’s role as elders: “it’s important that we talk with spiritual leaders who, after all, were militants before. These are the people who can communicate with their operative cells.”

Paradorn asked Taib “if he could send a signal to militant operatives in the three southern border provinces to reduce the level of their insurgent activities,” but all parties on the Thai side acknowledged that the insurgency is not a top-down movement, and instead consists of many groups and highly autonomous cells. Therefore, they anticipate violence to continue despite the upcoming peace talks. As southern-based journalist Don Pathan noted, “According to Malaysian and BRN-C sources, Hasan has not received the DPP’s [Dewan Penilian Party] blessing.” One BRN-C member told Pathan: “We knew Hasan was up to something but nobody took him seriously because he doesn’t have any clout with the militants on the ground. But nobody thought he would go as far as to enter an agreement with the Thais.” In short, the BRN could be trying to leverage a leadership position at the table by entering into talks, just as PULO has tried to do repeatedly since 2004.

On the other hand, the persistent violence leading up to the peace talks could also be part of the militants’ strategy, and does not necessarily mean that the talks will fail. The insurgents have an incentive to maintain a certain level of violence to pressure the government to make concessions under fear of renewed attacks.

The second issue is that it is unclear what the insurgents can realistically hope to gain from negotiations. For the Thai state, granting independence to militant groups operating in southern Thailand is not an option. Indeed, General Prayuth warned that even autonomy was unacceptable to the RTA: “It is impossible to give up [territory] to anyone. Everything must be discussed at the negotiation table, under the law and constitution.” The RTA remains the kingmaker in Thai politics and Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra has spent the past 18 months assuring them that she will not push forward policies that threaten their interests. Even Yingluck’s NSC chief acknowledged that autonomy is not on the table: “We will have to work out what the term entails for us and for them. Certainly it won’t mean an autonomous zone or another state. Allowing these border provinces to elect their own governors might be in the picture.” Yet Thailand has for years equivocated on even making Malayu an official language in the deep south for fear that it would fuel separatism.

In early March 2013, Thai security agencies approved a proposal to replace the draconian Emergency Decree that governs most of the deep south with the Internal Security Act in five more districts. While the ISA continues to give security forces blanket immunity, a practice that has long been an irritant to the Malay, Article 21 of the ISA gives authorities much more discretion in dropping existing charges and implementing a more meaningful amnesty program. Yet days later, the

“A successful peace process that started through Thaksin’s back-channel negotiations would put pressure on the military and royalist stalwarts to accede and grant amnesty to the polarizing former prime minister.”

43 According to Don Pathan, “There is general agreement that the BRN-C is ruled by a council known as the Dewan Penilian Party, or DPP, not by a single individual leader.” See Don Pathan, “It’s Unclear who Speaks for who in Thailand’s Deep South,” The Nation, March 13, 2013; “Pattani Blast During Sukampol Visit to South.” 44 Ibid. 45 See, for example, the NSC’s and 4th Army’s condensation of PULO President Kasturi Mahkota’s call for southern “autonomy” and bid for media exposure at “Malaysia Key to South Fight, NSC Chief Says,” Bangkok Post, February 27, 2013. 46 “Paradorn to Endorse Pact with BRN on Talks,” Bangkok Post, March 6, 2013.
cabinet extended the Emergency Decree through the next quarter, without taking up the issue of expanding the territory under the ISA.50 This decision was made only days before the peace talks were to begin, sending a negative signal to the militants. The Emergency Decree is a major source of contention and an issue that likely engenders broad support for the insurgents’ cause, while at the same time making uncertain the legal proceedings against any potential insurgent who surrenders.

Finally, there is considerable suspicion on the part of the military that the talks are a political façade that have nothing to do with resolving the conflict in the south. The governing Pheu Thai Party has tried to push a highly contentious national reconciliation bill through parliament since coming to power in mid-2011.51 The bill is controversial, and the potential for judicial action or a coup is so real that even with a parliamentary majority the Pheu Thai Party has repeatedly backed down. What makes it so divisive is that the centerpiece of the bill is an amnesty for former politicians, including Thaksin Shinawatra, now a fugitive from Thai justice. A successful peace process that started through Thaksin’s back-channel negotiations would put pressure on the military and royalist stalwarts to accede and grant amnesty to the polarizing former prime minister, something neither can countenance.52

As Don Pathan noted, “The role of the Army is still unclear, but a meaningful buy-in from the military has yet to be secured” in large part because of questions over what this will mean for Thaksin’s return.53 Indeed, the RTA appeared to be cut out of the upcoming peace talks, with only one delegate on the 15-member panel.54

Conclusion
The newly-announced peace talks are significant because it is the first of seven Thai governments since 2004 to publicly acknowledge the need for a political solution to the most violent conflict in the heart of economically-vibrant Southeast Asia.

For the militants, who have never been a mass-based organization and are clearly not losing the struggle, there is no great incentive to negotiate. The rate of violence has plateaued to an “acceptable” level, and there is not widespread pressure on them to settle. To date, many insurgent cells seem reluctant to halt the violence. Taib and the BRN seem to be leveraging a position for themselves. Can they bring the younger militants to the table? For now, that seems unlikely unless the Thai government is willing to make critical concessions.

Zachary Abuza is professor of political science and international relations at Simmons College. His most recent book is Conspiracy of Silence: The Insurgency in Southern Thailand and its Implications for Southeast Asian Security.

The Role of Converts in Al-Qa`ida-Related Terrorism Offenses in the United States

By Robin Simcox and Emily Dyer

WITH AL-QA’IDA’S ABILITY to carry out attacks in the United States seemingly diminishing, there will be increased focus on the threat posed by individuals not in contact with its leadership, but inspired by its ideology. At least part of this threat is from converts to Islam who might become radicalized to commit violence. Between 1997 and 2011, 171 individuals were either convicted of al-Qa’ida related offenses (AQROs) within the U.S. civilian or military court system or committed a suicide attack on U.S. soil. Converts to Islam comprised almost a quarter of these individuals, or 40 out of the 171 convicted.1

In fact, in three of the years between 2007 and 2011, and in eight of the years between 1997 and 2011,2 converts committed a higher proportion of AQROs than non-converts. Tracking the backgrounds of these converts—and how they differ from non-converts—is beneficial in obtaining a greater understanding of the terrorism threat to the United States.

This article assesses the differing trends between convert and non-convert offenders in the United States in 10 specific fields: gender, age, nationality, ancestry, place of residence, education, occupation, terrorist training, combat experience and links to designated terrorist organizations (DTOs). The article then draws conclusions from the data gathered, and suggests how the threat may develop in the future.

Context and Methodology
The data extracted for this article comes from a larger study into al-Qa’ida terrorism trends over a 15-year period. That study, Al-Qa`ida in the United States: A Complete Analysis of Terrorism Offenses, examined all 171 individuals

50 “NSC Seeks to Extend Emergency Law,” Bangkok Post, March 4, 2013. For more on the RTA’s position and resistance to lifting the Emergency Decree, see “Prayuth: Insurgents Must Stop Violence First,” Bangkok Post, March 14, 2013.
53 Pathan.
54 The NSC at first said that there would be no RTA presence. See “Army to Join March 28 Peace Talks with BRN,” Thai News Agency, March 14, 2013.

1 All converts were convicted in the U.S. court system. There is yet to be an example of a convert who committed a suicide attack on U.S. soil.
who committed AQROs and provided a statistical breakdown of key trends. This article provides the condensed findings from that larger report, yet focuses more specifically on the role of converts to Islam.

To determine which cases to include in the study, the authors started with the largest possible number of individuals who could have been interpreted as connected to al-Qa’ida or inspired by al-Qa’ida. Each of these cases was analyzed, with a strict methodological definition of terms and a high burden of proof in the criteria for inclusion. There were hundreds of perpetrators who may have appeared to be inspired by al-Qa’ida, yet when the information in the actual trial was analyzed closely, their primary motivation was nationalist or for financial gain. Therefore, the 171 figure relates to cases that could confidently be called al-Qa’ida or al-Qa’ida-inspired terrorism.

In both the larger report and in this article, all data was gathered by analyzing official government documentation, court records and court transcripts when available. Additional data was acquired using an online media database with exhaustive records of local and national press sources, and academic texts.

The Findings

Gender

In the 171 cases, 97% of non-converts were men and 3% women. In the case of converts, however, only 90% were men while 10% were women. Overall, eight women committed AQROs, and half of these were converts.

Women converts occasionally acted in support roles to male plotters. For example, October Lewis wired money to her ex-husband, knowing that it would be used in his efforts to join the Taliban. Nadia Rockwood provided false statements to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), having denied delivering a letter containing a list of targets for assassination, composed by her husband Paul Rockwood, to another individual.

One exception was Aafia Siddiqui, an al-Qa’ida associate convicted in 2010 for attempting to murder U.S. officers and employees in Afghanistan, and for assaulting the FBI agent, U.S. Army officer, and interpreter who tried to stop her. Colleen LaRose also played a more active role in conspiring to kill Lars Vilks, a Swedish cartoonist, in February 2011. Jamie Paulin-Ramirez was charged alongside Colleen LaRose and pleaded guilty in March 2011 to providing material support to terrorists.

Nationality

The vast majority of converts (95%) were U.S. citizens, significantly higher than the 54% of U.S. citizens among all AQRO perpetrators. The remaining 5% of converts were British (for example, the “shoe bomber,” Richard Reid) or Australian (for example, David Hicks, who was found guilty in a military court of providing material support to al-Qa’ida in Afghanistan). By contrast, 45% of non-converts were U.S. citizens.

When disaggregated further, 83% of converts were born in the United States, significantly higher than the 21% among non-converts. Of all U.S.-born individuals, 54% were converts. Examples of U.S.-born converts include Hassan Abu-Jihaad, who provided classified information concerning the movements of a U.S. Navy battle group, and Daniel Maldonado, who received military training at a camp in Somalia where members of al-Qa’ida were present.

Age

Converts were significantly older at the time of charge than non-converts. Converts were most commonly aged 32, compared to 24 for non-converts, while the median age of converts (31.2) was slightly older than that of non-converts (29.1). The most common age at the time of offense for all 171 individuals was between 20 and 24 (33%).

One explanation as to why convert offenses commonly fell outside this age range is that at least seven offenders were already over 24-years-old by the time they had converted to Islam.

Ancestry

Nearly two-thirds of converts were of African American (40%) or American White Caucasian (25%) ancestry, while the only non-convert to have either of these ancestries was Tarik Shah, who was the son of one of Malcolm X’s aides and pleaded guilty to conspiring to provide material support to al-Qa’ida.
African American converts included Abdulhakim Muhammad, who used a rifle to shoot two U.S. soldiers at a military recruiting center in Little Rock, Arkansas, and Barry Walter Bujol, who was convicted in November 2011 for attempting to aid al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and who had been e-mailing its influential cleric, Anwar al-Awlaki.\textsuperscript{16}

American White Caucasian converts included Randall Royer, a member of a Virginia cell seeking to assist Lashkar-i-Tayyiba (LeT),\textsuperscript{18} and Zachary Chesser, who attempted to travel to Somalia to join al-Shabab as a foreign fighter on two occasions.\textsuperscript{19} Three of the four female converts were also American White Caucasians.

**Place of Residence**

Within the United States, the highest proportion of offenders lived in New York (14%) at the time of charge or attack, followed by Florida (11%) and New Jersey (9%). Converts, however, tended to be based elsewhere, with only two convert offenders residing in New York, one in New Jersey and none in Florida.\textsuperscript{20}

Instead, converts comprised all of the offenders in Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, and Washington, D.C., and half the offenders in Washington, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Texas.\textsuperscript{21} The highest convert presence was in Oregon, where converts (all in a cell seeking to assist the Taliban post-9/11) made up four out of the five offenders (80%), and in Virginia, with four out of nine offenders (44%). A disproportionately high number of converts lived in the western United States (36%) compared to non-converts (16%).

**Education**

Converts did not differ greatly to non-converts in their level of education. In both categories, 52% of individuals had attended some form of college.

**Occupation**

Of converts, 63% were employed or attending school at the time of offense (55% employed, with 35% in skilled employment, and 8% receiving an education). Skilled convert employees included Paul Rockwood, a meteorological technician.\textsuperscript{21}

Of non-converts, 55% were employed or receiving an education (40% employed, with 15% in skilled employment, and 15% receiving an education). Non-converts were also more likely to be unemployed than converts (30% vs. 23%). This did not, however, necessarily mean that they were impoverished. For example, “American Taliban” John Walker Lindh was technically unemployed, yet he came from an affluent background.\textsuperscript{24}

**Combat Experience**

While a higher proportion of non-converts received training in 2000 (33% vs. 20%), a higher proportion of converts received training in 2001 (40% vs. 16%). This suggests that the events of 9/11 disproportionately inspired converts to receive terrorist training abroad. Converts were most likely to have trained in Afghanistan.

**Links to Designated Terrorist Organizations**

Converts were significantly less likely to be connected to DTOs than non-converts. A quarter of converts had received terrorist training to both Indiana and Illinois (25% vs. 16%). While a higher proportion of non-converts received training in 2000 (33% vs. 20%), a higher proportion of converts received training in 2001 (40% vs. 16%). This suggests that the events of 9/11 disproportionately inspired converts to receive terrorist training abroad. Converts were most likely to have trained in Afghanistan.

**Terrorist Training**

Converts were less likely to have received terrorist training than non-converts. A quarter of converts had received terrorist training, compared to 51% of non-converts.

Converts were more likely than non-converts (54% vs. 33%) to have received terrorist training and then to have moved on to actual combat. Converts with both training and combat experience included Randall Royer, who fought in Bosnia and Pakistan.\textsuperscript{27}

**Pre-train education**

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**25** Terrorist training was defined as attendance at a camp specifically designed and organized to train “mujahidin” fighters, and which was formally run by al-Qaeda or al-Qaeda-inspired groups. These were all abroad, with the exception of a training camp established in Bly, Oregon, in 2000. Despite its lack of success, the Oregon camp constituted inclusion because the primary trainer, Oussama Kassir, had trained in Afghanistan himself and was well connected to the broader jihadist network.


**28** A DTO is defined as being on either the U.S. Department of State’s list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations or the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List.

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\textsuperscript{17} “Texas Man Sentenced to 20 Years in Prison for Attempting to Provide Material Support to al Qaeda,” U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, May 24, 2012.


\textsuperscript{19} “Virginia Man Pleads Guilty to Providing Material Support to a Foreign Terrorist Organization and Encouraging Violent Jihadists to Kill U.S. Citizens,” U.S. Department of Justice, October 20, 2010.

\textsuperscript{20} A convert who had significant links to Florida was Jose Padilla, who was convicted in August 2007 for conspiring to provide and providing material support to al-Qaeda and conspiring to murder, kidnap, and main people abroad. Padilla lived in Florida between 1990 and 1997. He had not been living there, however, for the five years up to his eventual arrest, and so he was not classified as a Florida resident in the study.

\textsuperscript{21} The exact numerical breakdown is as follows: Alaska (two offenders); Arizona, Arkansas, Tennessee, Washington, and Washington, D.C. (one offender in each state/district); Pennsylvania (two offenders); and Texas (three offenders).

\textsuperscript{22} Skilled employment was defined as a job where formal educational or a technical qualification and/or experience was required.


\textsuperscript{24} “Profiles of John Walker Lindh, Osama bin Laden,” CNN, July 20, 2002.
non-converts (38% vs. 63%). Of the relatively small number of converts who were connected to a DTO, 60% were connected to al-Qa’ida, 27% to the LeT, 13% to AQAP, 7% to al-Shabab and 7% to the Pakistan-based Harkat-ul-Mujahidin (HuM). Only two converts had connections to more than one DTO: John Walker Lindh (al-Qa’ida and HuM) and David Hicks (al-Qa’ida and the LeT).

Of the larger number of non-converts who were connected to a DTO, 63% were connected to al-Qa’ida, 12% to the LeT, 10% to al-Shabab and 1% to AQAP. While there were no non-converts connected to HuM, there were a variety of organizations that only had non-converts connected to them: Makhtab-al-Khidamat, the al-Haramain Foundation, the Armed Islamic Group, Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Jemaah Islamiya, al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya, Ansar al-Islam, al-Ittihad al-Islami and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan. There were also six individuals connected to multiple groups.

This shows that while converts were less likely to have been connected to DTOs than non-converts, those who were often had connections to al-Qa’ida, displaying the seriousness of some of these cases. For example, Bryant Neal Vinas consulted with senior al-Qa’ida members, providing them with information as part of a plot to attack New York’s Long Island Rail Road system.29

**Mass Casualty Operatives**

Overall, 21% of all individuals were mass casualty operatives (MCOs): individuals who committed an AQRO and were part of a major plot. This included any kind of planned or premeditated attack that led to multiple deaths; a terrorism conspiracy that led to a successful, mass casualty attack; an attempted mass casualty attack that took place without the state’s knowledge yet led to no fatalities; a plot with operational involvement from al-Qa’ida or another DTO; or a plot in which components for a bomb were purchased or assembled without an undercover investigation taking place. These plots included the “millennium bomb” plot, the “shoe bomb” plot and the suicide attacks of 9/11.

There was a lower proportion of individual converts (11%) involved in the 10 most serious terrorism plots against the United States than there were in the total number of overall offenses (23%).30 Convert MCOs included two members of al-Qa’ida: Wadih el-Hage and Richard Reid. Both had received terrorist training. There has only been one convert MCO since 2003 (Abdulhakim Muhammad), however, and he did not receive terrorist training.

**Comparison and Process**

Out of the 171 individuals who were either convicted of AQROs within the U.S. civilian or military court system or who committed a suicide attack on U.S. soil between 1997 and 2011, 23% were converts to Islam. This number is high in comparison to the United Kingdom, where only 15% of individuals who committed Islamism-related offenses were converts.31 The U.S. statistic, however, is exactly in line with the proportion of converts residing in the United States. According to 2007 data from the Pew Research Center, 23% of Muslims in the United States are converts to Islam.32 In comparison, only 4% of the UK Muslim population are considered converts, making the British figure disproportionately high.33

In terms of process, there tended to be several years between conversion to Islam and the criminal’s decision to commit a terrorist offense. Among the cases, offenses committed immediately after conversion were rare. Exceptions to this included LaRose and Ramirez,

“The data suggests that it is not necessarily socioeconomic factors that may inspire some converts to Islam to commit AQROs. Converts who were convicted of AQROs were by no means all socially disenfranchised, impoverished individuals who turned to extremism out of desperation.”

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30 The 10 major plots were: the East African embassy bomb attacks in 1998; the “millennium bomb” plot in 2000; the “shoe bomb” plot in 2001; the suicide attacks of 9/11; the Camp Pennsylavnia murders in 2003; the University of North Carolina plot in 2006; the “underwear bomb” plot in 2009; the New York City subway plot in 2009; the Florence Army Recruitment Center shootings in 2009; and the Times Square car bomb plot in 2010.
33 The number of converts in the United Kingdom has not been statistically measured by the government. This figure is based on research conducted by the interfaith group Faith Matters, which suggested there could be as many as 100,000 converts in the United Kingdom. See “The Islamification of Britain: Record Numbers Embrace Muslim Faith,” Independent, January 4, 2011.
Conclusion

The data suggests that it is not necessarily socioeconomic factors that may inspire some converts to Islam to commit AQROs. Converts who were convicted of AQROs were by no means all socially disenfranchised, impoverished individuals who turned to extremism out of desperation. Instead, they were likely U.S.-born young men with a good education who had since found regular work.

The fact that American Muslims are generally affluent has been identified as one reason limiting incidents of homegrown extremism. Yet this study’s findings should serve as a reminder that other factors—such as ideology or the suffering of Muslims abroad—can be just as significant as poverty in placing individuals on a path to radicalization.

The data should also have an impact on the response from European policymakers. While enhancing the socioeconomic prospects of Europe’s Muslim communities remains worthwhile, the data suggests that it will not be a panacea to preventing radicalization at home.

Robin Simcox is a Research Fellow at the Henry Jackson Society. He previously was a Research Fellow at the Centre for Social Cohesion, a think-tank studying extremism and terrorism in the United Kingdom. He has written for the Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times, New Republic, Weekly Standard and the Guardian. Mr. Simcox has an MSc in U.S. Foreign Policy from the Institute for the Study of Americas, University of London, and a BA in History from the University of Leeds.

Emily Dyer is a Research Fellow at the Henry Jackson Society. She previously worked as a Higher Executive Officer for the Preventing Extremism Unit at the UK Department for Education, where she wrote several papers on extremism within educational settings. Ms. Dyer has a BA in International Relations from the University of Birmingham, where she produced a First class dissertation on Islamic feminism in Iran, and has traveled widely within Syria.

The Threat from Rising Extremism in the Maldives

By Animesh Roul

The Indian Ocean archipelago state of the Maldives is best known for its scenic and secluded tourist resorts. An estimated 400,000 people live on approximately 1,200-2,000 small islands, grouped into 26 atolls. The tourism industry accounts for 30% of its gross domestic product, with an estimated 900,000 foreigners visiting the country each year. In the past decade, however, the Maldives has experienced political uncertainty and growing religious extremism.

In 2008, the Maldives held its first democratic presidential elections. Mohamed Nasheed defeated Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who had ruled the country for 30 years, winning 54% of the vote. During the election campaign, Gayoom and his supporters accused Nasheed, a Sunni Muslim, of spreading Christianity in the Maldives. In December 2011, after three years in power, Nasheed and his Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) faced massive protests by opposition parties, religious groups and their thousands of supporters in the capital Male. Called the “Defend Islam” protests, the organizers accused the Nasheed administration of defiling Islam, arguing that Nasheed promoted Western ideals and culture and restricted the spread of more austere Islamic practices. The protests continued into 2012. On February 7, 2012, a bloodless coup toppled the Maldives’ first democratically-elected government.

Since Islam was introduced in the Maldives in the 12th century, religious practices in the country have been moderate. Yet in the past decade, the country has grown increasingly religiously conservative. This became especially evident following the implementation of political reforms and the transition to multiparty democracy in 2008, which gave a greater voice to religious conservatives and those calling for the rigid implementation of Shari’a (Islamic law) in the Maldives.

This article examines religious conservatism and extremist violence in the Maldives, as well as cases of Maldivians joining jihadist groups. It finds that religious conservatism is on the rise in the Maldives, which could result in more violence and affect the country’s lucrative tourism industry.

A Move Toward Religious Conservatism

For hundreds of years, Sunni Muslims in the Maldives have largely practiced a more liberal form of the religion. Yet during Maumoon Abdul Gayoom’s three-decade authoritarian rule, the Egyptian-trained religious scholar enacted a number of measures that, at least inadvertently, encouraged more hard line Islamist elements in the country. In 1994, the Protection of Religious Unity Act was passed, which restricted the freedom to practice any other religion besides Islam. In 1996, Gayoom constituted the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (which was renamed the Ministry of Islamic Affairs in 2008) charged with overseeing religious affairs in the country. This body of clerics pressured the government to carry out moral and cultural policing of alleged “anti-Islamic activities.” In 2008, it asked the police to ban night clubs and discotheques for New Year’s Eve celebrations, saying that they were contrary to Islam.

5 Ibid.
6 Wright. The “Defend Islam” banners displayed slogans such as “We stand united for Islam and the nation,” “No idols in this holy land,” “No to the Zionist murderers,” and “No to El Al (Israeli) Airlines.”
8 Wright.
11 Ibid.
By the end of Gayoom’s time in office in 2008, the dress code for women had grown increasingly conservative, and more and more men grew out their beards. Whereas women used to dress in bright colored clothes, they increasingly wear black robes and headscarves today. On more conservative islands such as Himandhoo, women wear black abayas and face veils. Ahmed Naseem, the Maldivian foreign minister until the coup in 2012, said that the Maldives “had no one wearing headscarves 10 years ago,” but it is common now. From imposing a ban on Christian missionary radio to apprehending migrant service providers for allegedly preaching and practicing their own religion, Gayoom’s regime initiated an era of state-backed religious intolerance and radicalization in the Maldives.

Another factor contributing to extremism has been the role of foreign madrasa education. The offer of free education in madrasas in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia is widely acknowledged as a core means of radicalizing Maldivians locally, with well-meaning parents sending their children off on scholarships to “study Islam.” Students who unwittingly attended more radical madrasas may have returned home to the Maldives, preaching their newly-acquired views. After the Maldives suffered its first terrorist attack in 2007, Gayoom himself warned of this problem, stating, “Maldivians are influenced by what is happening in the world. They go to Pakistan, study in madrasas and come back with extreme religious ideas.”

Azra Naseem, a Maldivian academic and author, argues that grassroots radicalization is happening at a fast rate. Naseem said that the contemporary Maldivian political environment favors radical and political Islam taking root in Maldivian society, especially when political parties and civil society increasingly take refuge in religion. In May 2010, for example, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs published a new set of regulations under the Protection of Religious Unity Act of 1994. The new legislation prohibited “talking about religions other than Islam in Maldives, and propagating such religions,” as well as reinforcing that it is illegal “to use any kind of medium to propagate any religion other than Islam.” Some newly added regulations also made it “illegal to show or spread sound bites of programs on religions other than Islam, and any such literature, drawings, advertisements, music, and songs,” as well as use “any Internet website, blog, newspaper, or magazine to publish such material.”

A major force behind more austere religious practices in the Maldives is the Adhaalath Party (Justice Party). It has controlled the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, with Shaykh Shaheem Ali Saeed as its current minister. The party supports the strict implementation of Shari’a, and it has outspokenly argued that music and singing are baram (forbidden) in Islam. The party has called for an end to the sale of alcohol at the country’s hundreds of luxury resorts, the only places where it is served in the country. It is widely considered the greatest force behind the Maldives’ movement toward religious conservatism. Most recently, Islamic Affairs Minister Saeed, a leading member of the Adhaalath Party, has started a campaign against Christians and what he termed “Freemasons,” alleging that they want to “wipe out” Islam from the Maldives.

“In the past decade, the Maldives has experienced an increase in religious conservatism, and this has coincided with a number of violent attacks on liberal activists and other citizens who have expressed outspoken support for moderate religious practices.”

14 Ibid.; Lancaster.
15 Wright.
17 Other observers point to the role of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, which built religious facilities in the country that some allege further intolerance. These facilities include the Islamic Studies Institute, a seven-story-high school in Male built by Saudi Arabia. See Lancaster.
18 Wright; Denyer; personal interview, JJ Robinson, editor, Minivan News, March 2, 2013.
20 Personal interview, Azra Naseem, Maldivian author and academic, November 6, 2012. 21 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 The links between political parties and religious NGOs like IFM and JS are clear as they work together in organizing preaching events in the Maldives. Even the outgoing Nasheed-led MDP party worked with these religious NGOs through the Islamic Affairs Ministry to carry out religious activities. For details on the Salafist nature of the IFM and JS, see JJ Robinson, “Islamic Foundation Calls for Death Sentence if Apostle Fails to Repent,”
example, is former Guantanamo Bay prisoner Ibrahim Fauzee. In May 2002, Fauzee was arrested in Karachi while living in a suspected al-Qa‘ida safe house.\(^{29}\) He was eventually released from Guantanamo Bay and repatriated to the Maldives in 2005, where he established the IFM in 2009.\(^{30}\)

These parties and organizations were all part of the “Defend Islam” protests in December 2011, which unleashed a chain of events that culminated in the fall of Nasheed’s government.\(^{31}\)

**Extremist Incidents**

Intolerance toward other religious and cultural symbols were manifested during the annual summit meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in November 2011, when Islamist protestors damaged monuments gifted to the Maldives by SAARC member countries.\(^{32}\) Protestors targeted a Pakistani monument that was given to the Male government because it depicted objects of worship which, according to the protestors, were “anti-Islam” as they negated “the oneness of God.”\(^{33}\) Protest events eventually led to the removal of both Bhutan’s and Sri Lanka’s monuments as well.\(^{34}\)

On February 7, 2012, a group of Islamist radicals vandalized archaeological artifacts that were mostly ancient Hindu and Buddhist relics in the National Museum. According to the museum’s director, the vandals destroyed “99%” of the evidence of the Maldives’ pre-Islamic history prior to the 12\(^{th}\) century.\(^{35}\) Another official at the museum said that the group “deliberately targeted the Buddhist relics and ruins of monasteries exhibited in the pre-Islamic collection, destroying most items beyond repair.”\(^{36}\)

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs has, at least indirectly, encouraged such extremism. It has, for example, initiated crackdowns on media outlets for anti-Islamic content.\(^{37}\) The Communications Authority of the Maldives, on the order of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, blocked the blog of prominent free speech and religious freedom campaigner Khilath Rasheed (also known as Hilath) in November 2011.\(^{38}\) The communications authority was told by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs that the blog contained anti-Islamic material.\(^{39}\) In a country where the constitution says that every citizen is a Sunni Muslim, Rasheed’s claim of being a Sufi was viewed as a possible reason for the site’s closure.\(^{40}\) One month later, in December, 10 men attacked Rasheed, throwing stones at him during a peaceful rally he organized in Male.\(^{41}\) One of the stones fractured his skull.\(^{42}\) A few days after the incident, Rasheed was arrested and jailed for 24 days due to his participation in the rally.\(^{43}\) Rasheed said that he was arrested for “disrupting the religious unity of the Maldives, and that it was a threat to society.”\(^{44}\)


30 Ibid.


36 Ibid.


38 “Slashed Journalist Claims Attack was Targeted Assassination by Islamic Radicals,” Minivan News, July 2, 2012.


40 Ibid.


42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.


47 “Slashed Journalist Claims Attack was Targeted Assassination by Islamic Radicals.”

48 For details, see www.hilath.com/?p=16661.

49 He further wrote, “Now how could that happen? An MDMP Member of Parliament has confirmed to a Maldivian writer (who is a friend of mine) that after the attack on me, Mutalib commented in Parliament House in front of other Parliament Members: ‘Banemenuu Velezine aai Hilath maraulaanyame. E othe Hilath maraulaafa’ which means something to the effect: ‘See I told you we’ll murder Velezine and Hilath. We have already murdered
Rasheed has since fled the country.\textsuperscript{50}

On October 1, 2012, Afrasheem Ali, a liberal religious scholar and lawmaker, was stabbed to death at his home.\textsuperscript{51} He was stabbed four times in the back of the head after he returned home from appearing on a weekly television show.\textsuperscript{52} Considered an Islamic moderate, Afrasheem was outspoken in his controversial positions on issues such as the permissibility of playing music and praying next to the deceased.\textsuperscript{53} Authorities said that his murder was well-planned, although they denied that it was religiously motivated.\textsuperscript{54}

Most recently, a reporter for the MDP-aligned Raajje TV station, Ibrahim “Aswad” Waheed, was beaten unconscious with an iron bar while riding on a motorcycle near the beach area of Male on February 23, 2013.\textsuperscript{55} Authorities were still investigating the motive for the crime, but were confident that it was a “targeted attack.”\textsuperscript{56}

These incidents, which have all occurred in the past few years, reveal an environment in which moderate voices have been targeted in the Maldives. In addition to this violence, there is also evidence that a jihadist undercurrent may exist in the country.

The Sultan Park Bombing and the Role of Maldivians in Jihadist Groups

Unlike its larger South Asian neighbors, the Maldives has only experienced one terrorist attack perpetrated by Islamist terrorists. A bomb exploded in Sultan Park in Male on September 29, 2007. The explosion wounded at least 12 foreigners, including British, Japanese and Chinese tourists.\textsuperscript{57} The attack was aimed at the tourism industry, the lifeline of the country’s economy. Three men—Mohamed Sobah, Moosa Inaz and Ahmed Naseer—were sentenced to 15 years in jail.\textsuperscript{58} The men confessed to their roles in the incident and admitted their goal was to “target, attack and injure non-Muslims to fulfill jihad.”\textsuperscript{59} Terrorism charges were laid against 16 suspects, but many of them had already fled to Pakistan and Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{60}

After the Sultan Park bombing, authorities attempted to search the Dar-ul-Khair mosque on Himandhoo Island as part of the investigation. Upon arriving at the mosque on October 7, 2007, some 90 masked and helmeted members of the mosque confronted police, wielding wooden planks and refusing to let the police enter.\textsuperscript{61} Eventually the Maldivian army took over from the police, and established control of the mosque facility. The stand-off resulted in a number of injuries, and one police officer had his fingers cut off.\textsuperscript{62}

One month after the stand-off, a video appeared on the al-Qa`ida-linked al-EkhlaaS web forum posted by a group called Ansar al-Mujahidin.\textsuperscript{53} The video, which flashed the message “Your Brothers in the Maldives are Calling You,” contained footage recorded inside the Dar-ul-Khair mosque during the confrontation with police.\textsuperscript{64}

According to the indictment, from December 14, 2005 through June 2, 2009, Khan conspired with an individual named Ali Jaleel and others to provide material support and resources and to conceal the nature of such support and resources, knowing they would be used in a conspiracy to kill, maim, or kidnap persons abroad. Jaleel was a Maldivian national who resided outside the United States. Jaleel died while Targets the Maldives,” available at www.youtube.com/ watch?v=HZipCV7-EXk.

65 Makan.

66 “Oregon Resident Charged with Conspiring to Provide Material Support to Terrorists in Connection with Suicide Bombing of ISI Headquarters in Pakistan,” U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, March 5, 2013.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.


70 “Oregon Resident Charged with Conspiring to Provide Material Support to Terrorists in Connection with Suicide Bombing of ISI Headquarters in Pakistan.”
participating in the suicide attack on the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Headquarters in Lahore on May 27, 2009, according to the indictment.71

Khan, who has not been convicted, is currently awaiting trial in the United States.

There is also evidence that three jihadists from the Maldives “planned to create a terrorist group in the Maldives [in 2007-2008] and to send the group’s members to Pakistan for military training,” as stated by the Maldivian news website Haveeru Online.72 They were identified as Yoosuf Izadhy, Easa Ali, and Hasnain Abdullah Hameedh.73 At least one of these individuals did in fact travel to Pakistan, as Yoosuf Izadhy was arrested in Pakistan’s South Waziristan Agency in March 2009, along with eight other Maldivians.74

Underscoring the threat, former Maldivian President Mohamed Nasheed warned in 2009 that “Maldivian people are being recruited by Taliban and they are fighting in Pakistan. It’s a serious issue.”75 When asked how many Maldivians had traveled to Pakistan for this purpose, Nasheed put the number at “a few hundred.”76 In a country of less than 400,000 people, such numbers are not insignificant.

Conclusion
Despite its reputation as an idyllic paradise popular among Western tourists, political and religious developments in the Maldives should be monitored closely. In the past decade, the Maldives has experienced an increase in religious conservatism, and this has coincided with a number of violent attacks on liberal activists and other citizens who have expressed outspoken support for moderate religious practices.

The country has already suffered one terrorist attack targeting foreign tourists, and a number of Maldivians have traveled to Pakistan’s tribal areas to receive jihadist training. Moreover, evidence exists that jihadists tried to form a terrorist group in the country in 2007-2008.77

If the country continues down its current path, extremist incidents may rise, with violence targeted against the country’s more liberal citizens. There is also the risk that extremists could target the country’s tourism industry. The loss of this revenue source would be devastating to the Maldives.

Animesh Roul is the Executive Director and Co-founder of Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict, a Delhi-based policy research think-tank. He holds a Master of Philosophy degree from the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and has a master’s degree in Modern Indian History. Mr. Roul specializes in counterterrorism, radical Islam, terror financing, armed conflict and issues relating to arms control and proliferation in South Asia. He has written for Terrorism Monitor, the CTC Sentinel, Jane’s Intelligence Review and CBW Magazine among others.

Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity
February 1, 2013 (TURKEY): A suicide bomber attacked the U.S. Embassy in Ankara, killing a Turkish security guard outside the facility. Turkish authorities blamed the attack on the Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party-Front, an outlawed Marxist-Leninist group that was involved in attacks on U.S. targets in Turkey in the early 1990s. The United States announced that it was launching its own investigation. – New York Times, February 1

February 1, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber killed at least 23 people outside a Shi’a mosque in Hangu District in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. – CNN, February 1; BBC, February 1

February 1, 2013 (MALI/NIGERIA): A report in the Wall Street Journal suggested that hundreds of Boko Haram group militants trained in Mali’s Timbuktu, learning to repair Kalashnikovs and launch shoulder-fired weapons. The report, which was based on interviews with locals in Timbuktu, said that Nigerian Boko Haram fighters trained in the city for about 10 months, working with the local al-Qa’ida-linked militant group Ansar Eddine. “The presence of Nigerian trainees here [Timbuktu] validates recent fears among regional and Western intelligence officials that parts of the Sahara have become incubators where al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, or AQIM, is training Africans to fight jihad,” the article said. Islamist militants controlled Timbuktu for much of 2012, but in January 2013 French forces regained control of the city. – Wall Street Journal, February 1

February 2, 2013 (PAKISTAN): Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants attacked a Pakistani Army base in Lakki Marwat District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, killing at least nine army soldiers and four paramilitary soldiers. During the attack, 10 civilians were also killed. According to a TTP spokesman, the attack was in retaliation for the killings of two Taliban commanders in U.S. drone strikes. – New York Times, February 2

71 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
February 3, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in a vehicle filled with explosives attacked the police headquarters in Kirkuk. After the explosion, militants wearing police uniforms tried to storm the building. According to one police officer, “I saw the three suicide bombers running into the police building. They were throwing hand grenades at us. We opened fire on them and killed them immediately.” At least 30 people were killed in the assault. – CNN, February 4; Reuters, February 5; New York Times, February 3

February 4, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber attacked a government-supported militia in Taji, 12 miles north of Baghdad, killing at least three people. It was the second suicide attack in two days in the town. – Reuters, February 5

February 4, 2013 (SOMALIA): Al-Shabab said that they opened a new Twitter account in English, less than two weeks after Twitter suspended its previous account. According to the BBC, “The new al-Shabab account has 280 followers, compared to the previous account which had more than 20,000 followers. It was closed on 25 January, about a week after it announced the killing of a French spy, Denis Allex, it was holding hostage.” – BBC, February 4

February 5, 2013 (BULGARIA): The Bulgarian government completed its six-month inquiry into the bus bombing that killed five Israelis in Burgas, Bulgaria, in July 2012. The inquiry found that two suspects—who held Australian and Canadian passports—were directly linked to the militant wing of Iranian Hizb Allah. The report also found that “initial investigations—including the discovery of the bomber’s head at the scene of the attack—suggested the strike may have been a suicide bombing. But officials now believe the device may have been remotely controlled, or accidentally detonated by the bomber.” – BBC, February 5

February 5, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle attacked an Iraqi Army checkpoint in Taji, 12 miles north of Baghdad, killing at least three people. It was the second suicide attack in two days in the town. – Reuters, February 5

February 6, 2013 (SOMALIA): An improvised explosive device struck a vehicle carrying Ethiopian soldiers in Baidoa, reportedly killing two of them. – Garowe Online, February 7

February 6, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A new report in Pakistan’s The News International claims that Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) have created a joint special unit with the prime mission to attack prisons and free jailed militants. The unit, called Ansar al-Aseer (Supporters of Prisoners), is reportedly led by Adnan Rasheed, who himself escaped from prison in April 2012 after 200 Taliban militants attacked the Central Jail in Bannu, where he was held. Rasheed was in prison for trying to assassinate former Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf. – The News International, February 7

February 6, 2013 (MALI): A suicide bomber on a motorcycle attacked a military checkpoint in Gao in northern Mali, wounding one Malian soldier. The Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), a group linked to al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb, took responsibility. The incident marked the first suicide bombing in northern Mali since the start of the French-led military offensive in January 2013. – Voice of America, February 8; AFP, February 8

February 8, 2013 (MALI): Former U.S. Ambassador to Mali Vicki Huddleston said that France paid $17 million in ransom to free hostages seized from a French uranium mine in Niger in September 2010, money that allowed groups such as al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb to “buy weapons and recruit.” In February 2011, three of the hostages, including a Frenchwoman, were freed. According to the Associated Press, Huddleston’s allegations “strengthened the view that the Mali rebellion was funded largely by ransoms paid in recent years.” French officials have denied paying ransoms. – AP, February 9

February 8, 2013 (SOMALIA): Al-Shabab fighters ambushed Ethiopian troops between El Barde and Hudur, resulting in an unspecified number of casualties. – Garowe Online, February 7

February 8, 2013 (IRAQ): Two car bombs exploded at a vegetable market in a Shi’a area of Baghdad, killing at least 16 people. – Reuters, February 8

February 8, 2013 (IRAQ): Two car bombs exploded at a bus stop near a street market in a Shi’a area of Baghdad, killing at least 16 people. – Reuters, February 8

February 8, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A suspected U.S. drone killed nine alleged militants in South Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Seven of the dead were reportedly members of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, while two were allegedly members of al-Qa’ida. – Dawn, February 8

February 8, 2013 (MALI): Suspected gunmen from the Boko Haram group killed at least nine women vaccinating children against polio in Kano in northern Nigeria. – Guardian, February 8

February 9, 2013 (MALI): A suicide bomber in military fatigue detonated explosives near a checkpoint at the entrance to Gao, wounding one soldier. Authorities said that the bomber was Arab and a suspected member of the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). A suicide bomber attacked the same checkpoint the previous day. – AP, February 10

February 10, 2013 (GLOBAL): Muhammad al-Zawahiri, the brother of al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri, told a reporter that “if America does not stop (its) violations or attacks, there will not be just one Ayman al-Zawahiri, but all Muslims will
February 10, 2013 (THAILAND): A car bomb killed five soldiers in Yala Province in southern Thailand. – *Voice of America*, February 10

February 11, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in a vehicle killed at least eight people at a military checkpoint in Mosul, Ninawa Province. – *RFE/RL*, February 11

February 11, 2013 (SOMALIA): An al-Shabab suicide bomber in a vehicle targeted a senior police official in Galkayo, wounding the official and killing four people. – *Voice of America*, February 11; *AFP*, February 11

February 12, 2013 (YEMEN): Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) reportedly said that a drone strike last month killed the group’s top religious cleric, Shaykh Adel al-Ahab, in Shabwa Province. “A drone strike had targeted Sheikh Adel al-Ahab’s vehicle but he escaped and fled to a mountainous region where a raid by another drone killed him immediately,” a source close to AQAP told Agence France-Presse. – *AFP*, February 12

February 13, 2013 (THAILAND): At least 60 insurgents attacked a military base in Narathiwat Province in southern Thailand. The military, which reportedly knew of the attack in advance, killed at least 16 of the militants. The military said it suffered no casualties. – *Deutsche Welle*, February 13; *BBC*, February 13

February 14, 2013 (GLOBAL): The U.S. Treasury Department announced that it was freezing any assets of Yahya Abu al-Hamman, identified as the leader of al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb’s Sahel branch. – *Reuters*, February 14

February 14, 2013 (RUSSIA): A suicide bomber in a vehicle killed at least four police officers in Dagestan, located in Russia’s North Caucasus region. As stated by the Associated Press, “Russia’s North Caucasus and Dagestan in particular has for years been plagued by Islam-inspired insurgency which spread throughout the area after two separatist wars in Chechnya.” – *RFE/RL*, February 14; *AP*, February 14

February 14, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle killed seven people at a Frontier Corps checkpoint in Hangu District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. – *The New International*, February 14

February 16, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden water tanker targeted Shi’a Muslims at a crowded marketplace in Hazara, on the outskirts of Quetta. The explosion killed 83 people. According to a Quetta police official, the water tanker carried between 1,760-2,200 pounds of explosives. The sectarian militant group Lashkar-i-Jhangvi claimed responsibility. – *CNN*, February 16

February 16, 2013 (SOMALIA): A car bomb exploded at a restaurant near Mogadishu’s Liido beach, causing an unknown number of casualties. – *Garowe Online*, February 16

February 16, 2013 (NIGERIA): The Nigerian militant group Ansaru, which broke from Boko Haram, attacked a local prison in Bauchi State, and then targeted a worker’s camp for construction company Setraco, kidnapping seven foreign workers from the United Kingdom, Greece, Italy and Lebanon. The militants shot and killed one guard at the camp. On March 9, Ansaru said that they had killed all seven hostages in response to attempts by the United Kingdom and Nigeria to free them. The statement included screen shots of a video purportedly showing a number of dead hostages. – *AP*, February 17; *Vanguard*, February 23; *Reuters*, March 9

February 17, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan authorities captured Pakistani Taliban leader Maulvi Faqir Muhammad in Nangarhar Province in eastern Afghanistan. According to the *New York Times*, “Muhammad, believed to be in his 40s, fled to Afghanistan in 2010 after an offensive by Pakistan’s military on his stronghold in the Bajaur tribal agency...Muhammad continued to attack Pakistani forces in Bajaur after taking refuge in the isolated valleys of Kunar and Nuristan Provinces in northeastern Afghanistan.” – *New York Times*, February 19

February 17, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber killed Ali Aouni, the head of Iraq’s intelligence academy, outside his home in Tal Afar. The explosion also killed three of his bodyguards. – *Global Post*, February 16

February 17, 2013 (IRAQ): At least eight car bombs tore through Baghdad, killing 28 people in Shi’a districts in the city. The Islamic State of Iraq claimed responsibility. According to Reuters, “Insurgents are stepping up attacks at a time when [Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki] is facing two months of protests by thousands of Sunni Muslims in western provinces, who accuse his government of marginalising their sect.” – *Reuters*, February 18

February 19, 2013 (CAMEROON): Boko Haram kidnapped seven French tourists, including four children, in northwest Cameroon. According to Agence France-Presse, “A Western diplomat in the region told AFP that six armed kidnappers on three motorbikes abducted a couple, their four children and an uncle in the northern [Cameroon] village of Dabanga near the Nigerian border.” Boko Haram later claimed responsibility. On February 26, Boko Haram released a video showing the kidnapped family, saying that if the group’s demands are not met, “we
February 21, 2013 (UNITED KINGDOM): A UK court found three men guilty of planning a terrorism campaign in the United Kingdom, raising money for terrorism and recruiting others for a terrorist act. The men, Irfan Naseer, Irfan Khalid and Asghik Ali, were based in Birmingham and planned to use eight suicide bombers, armed with guns, to cause “carnage” in the United Kingdom. According to the Telegraph, “Naseer, a pharmacy student, had planned to extract ammonium nitrate—used as [the] main explosive—from sports injury cold packs...They also considered other forms of attack such [as] putting poison in hand cream to rub on car and door handles or even putting blades on the front of a vehicle and driving it into a crowd of people.” – Telegraph, February 21

February 21, 2013 (SYRIA): A suicide bomber in a vehicle killed at least 53 people near Syria’s ruling party headquarters in Damascus. – AP, February 22

February 21, 2013 (KENYA): Gunmen shot and killed seven people—five men and two women—in an attack on a mosque in northeastern Kenya near the Somali border. – BBC, February 21


February 22, 2013 (MALI): Two suicide bombers in separate vehicles targeted civilians as well as members of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) near Tessalit in northern Mali, killing three people. There was no immediate claim of responsibility. The MNLA is a Tuareg separatist group that is now working with the French military in northern Mali. – AFP, February 22; Voice of America, February 22

February 24, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle attacked a police checkpoint in Pul-i-Alam on the main highway between Kabul and Logar Province, killing one policeman. – Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, February 24

February 24, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle attacked the National Directorate of Security compound in Jalalabad, killing two Afghan intelligence agents. – Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, February 24

February 24, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in a vehicle was shot to death before he could trigger his explosives in Kabul’s diplomatic enclave of Wazir Akbar Khan. – Dawn, February 24; Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, February 24

February 24, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated an explosives vest while being searched at the entrance to the police headquarters for Baraki Barak district in Logar Province, wounding one policeman. – Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, February 24

February 24, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber slid underneath a bus filled with Afghan soldiers in Kabul, wounding six soldiers and four civilians. According to the Guardian, “The man, wearing a black overcoat, approached the bus purposefully in heavy morning snow as soldiers were boarding, set down his umbrella and went under the chassis as if to fix something, according to a witness.” He then detonated his explosives. – Guardian, February 27

February 26, 2013 (MALI): A suicide bomber in a vehicle detonated explosives at a checkpoint run by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) in Kidal, killing at least six MNLA fighters. The MNLA is a Tuareg separatist group that is now working with the French military in northern Mali. – Voice of America, February 27

February 26, 2013 (LIBYA): Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zidan demanded that militias evacuate their buildings and headquarters, promising that the government would be decisive in dealing with armed groups that have hijacked the country. He said that Libya “will not be lenient and we will not permit hijacking of Tripoli or Benghazi or any other city.” – AP, February 28

February 28, 2013 (TURKEY): A Turkish news agency reported that police have arrested 11 people with suspected links to al-Qaeda, as well as seizing 55 pounds of plastic explosives, in simultaneous raids in Istanbul and Tekirdag Province. The police reportedly recovered photographs of the U.S. Consulate, a synagogue and a church in Istanbul. – AP, February 28

February 26, 2013 (PAKISTAN): Militants bombed four boys’ schools in Mohmand Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. There were no casualties. According to a Pakistani official, Taliban attacks have now destroyed more than 100 schools in Mohmand Agency. – Dawn, February 28

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February 28, 2013 (THAILAND): For the first time since the start of the current insurgency in southern Thailand in 2004, Thailand’s government said that it will hold formal peace talks with a major Muslim rebel group in March. According to Reuters, “The talks follow a shift in Thailand’s stance last year when it acknowledged the conflict’s ‘political nature’ for the first time after years of relying on military action... in the southern provinces.” Since 2004, the insurgency in southern Thailand has claimed more than 5,000 lives. According to Reuters, “Resistance to Buddhist rule from Bangkok has existed for decades in the predominantly Muslim provinces in the south, waning briefly in the 1990s before resurfacing violently in January 2004.” – Reuters, February 28

February 28, 2013 (MALI): Algerian television reported that French forces in Mali have killed Abdelhamid Abu Zeid, a leading commander in al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The station said that Abu Zeid was killed three days earlier in the region of Tigargara in northern Mali. On March 23, France confirmed “with certainty” that Abu Zeid was killed during a French offensive at the end of February. – Reuters, February 28; Reuters, March 23; New York Times, March 23