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Arc of Convergence: AQAP, Ansar al-Shari`a and the Struggle for Yemen

By Christopher Swift

Yemeni army officials pray over the coffins of soldiers killed in a May 21 suicide bombing in Sana`a. - AFP/Getty Images

THE MAY 21, 2012, suicide attack on Yemeni soldiers parading in Sana`a's al-Sabin Square marked a turning point in Yemen's struggle against al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and its subsidiary, Ansar al-Shari`a. Coming two weeks after Yemeni President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi's pledge to purge terrorists from "every district, village, and place,"[1] the perpetrators cast the bombing as a retaliatory strike. "The primary target of this blessed operation was the defense minister of the Sana`a regime and his corrupt entourage," proclaimed Ansar al-Shari`a's Madad News Agency. "It came in response to the unjust war launched by the Sana`a regime's forces in cooperation with the American and Saudi forces."[2]

The bombing also revealed more parochial motives. In addition to retaliation, Ansar al-Shari`a claimed to avenge "the demonstrators and all Muslims who tasted the scourge of the Yemeni central security forces" during the Arab Spring protests.[3] Recalling the violent crackdown on protestors in Sana`a and the alleged torture of Islamist activists, the communiqué justified the slaughter of Yemeni soldiers in populist terms while appealing to citizens who survived similar "massacres" at the hands of the previous regime. This reasoning minimized global jihad while emphasizing national struggle. Despite its Salafi-jihadi boilerplate, however, Ansar al-Shari`a appeared far more concerned with co-opting the "recent revolution" in Yemen than resisting the unholy U.S.-Saudi alliance.

1 "Hadi: I Won't Allow Split in Army," *Yemen Fox* [Sana`a], May 6, 2012.
2 "Statement on the Sabin Square Bombing," Madad News

Agency [Azzan], May 21, 2012.
3 Ibid.

This emphasis on national struggle reflects a phase shift in al-Qa`ida's messaging and methods. As Barak Barfi and Ryan Evans have observed, AQAP eschews tribal domination in favor of more nuanced efforts to capture indigenous support.[4] Other studies reinforce this point, explaining how "strong norms of retribution, tribal coherence, and force of arms" limit its ability to "seize support through repression."[5] Despite being rooted in Yemen's culture, society, and tribal system, the movement maintains its rhetorical and operational focus on the far enemy—underscored by the recent attempt to bomb a passenger aircraft bound for the United States.[6] These parallel approaches could ultimately diverge, creating tensions between national objectives and international ambitions. For the moment, however, AQAP has proven remarkably adept at reconciling the ideological dictates of global jihad with the practical realities of local insurgency.

This article examines that reconciliation in three stages. First, it explains how AQAP uses Ansar al-Shari`a to operate and propagate within Yemen's tribal society. Second, it discusses AQAP's current capabilities and structure, with particular emphasis on its operations in Abyan and Shabwa provinces. Third, it examines AQAP's efforts to knit Saudi ideologues, Yemeni tribesmen, and a diverse cohort of foreign fighters into an ideologically and operationally coherent coalition. Drawing on more than 40 interviews with religious, political, and tribal leaders from 14 of Yemen's 21 provinces conducted in May and June 2012, this analysis addresses the arc of convergence among these factions and the implications for regional counterterrorism operations.

Tribal Equilibrium

AQAP is, and still remains, a conglomerate. Conceived in a January 2009 merger between al-Qa`ida cells operating in Saudi Arabia and Yemen, its members brought different perspectives and experiences to their regional franchise. Some, like former Guantanamo detainees Said Ali al-Shihri and Mohamed Atiq Awayd al-Harbi, fled to Yemen following their repatriation and failed rehabilitation in Saudi Arabia.[7] Others, including Yemenis such as Nasir al-Wahayshi, served with Usama bin Ladin in Afghanistan before bringing the jihad back home.[8] Proven in war and hardened by prison, this cohort rejected the informal accommodation between their Arab Afghan predecessors and Yemen's security services and called for jihad against the Yemeni regime.[9]

AQAP also drew lessons directly from other al-Qa`ida franchises. Like al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI), the movement established its own provisional Islamic state.[10] Like al-Qa`ida's central leadership, it courted religious and tribal leaders with longstanding grievances, encouraging conservative clerics like Abdul Majid al-Zindani to challenge the Yemeni regime[11] and prominent shaykhs like Tariq al-Fadhli to turn against it.[12] Despite these similarities, however, AQAP built its movement from the ground up rather than the top down. Anxious to avoid an indigenous uprising similar to the Sunni Awakening in Iraq, al-Wahayshi pursued a three-pronged strategy of engagement, empowerment, and dependency among Yemen's tribes.

Much of this engagement now occurs through Ansar al-Shari`a, which was reportedly founded in 2009.[13] Operating under its own banner, the movement issues communiqués, operates media outlets, and generates propaganda aimed at Yemen's Sunni tribesmen.[14] In doing

> ## "AQAP has proven remarkably adept at reconciling the ideological dictates of global jihad with the practical realities of local insurgency."

so, Ansar al-Shari`a has abandoned the elitist, quasi-jurisprudential rhetoric espoused by al-Qa`ida purists in favor of a more populist (and often parochial) message.[15] As senior AQAP official Abu Zubayr Adel al-Abab observed, "the name Ansar al-Shari`a is what we use to introduce ourselves in areas where we work, to tell people about our work and goals, and [to show] that we are on the path of Allah."[16]

Tribal leaders confirm this subsidiary relationship. Despite its unique brand, AQAP uses Ansar al-Shari`a to promote its activities in tribal areas, legitimize its members as "supporters" of Islamic law, and elicit popular support without implicating the controversial al-Qa`ida brand.[17] Combined with its direct appeals to demonstrators and Arab youth, this

4 Barak Barfi, "AQAP's Soft Power Strategy in Yemen," *CTC Sentinel* 3:11-12 (2010); Ryan Evans, "From Iraq to Yemen: Al-Qa`ida's Shifting Strategies," *CTC Sentinel* 3:10 (2010).

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

6 "Al-Qaeda Yemen Plane Bomb Plot Foiled by 'Insider,'" BBC News, May 8, 2012.

7 Abdullah al-Oraifij and Khaled al-Shalahi, "Al-Oufi, Al-Shihiri Betrayed Our Trust: Families, Friends," *Saudi Gazette,* January 28, 2009.

8 Sudarsan Raghavan, "Al-Qaeda Group in Yemen Gaining Prominence," *Washington Post*, December 28, 2009.

9 Gregory D. Johnsen, "Testimony Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee," U.S. Senate, January 20, 2010.

10 Aradar Madayah and Sawsan Abu-Husain, "Al-Qaeda Call for Islamic State in Southern Yemen," *Asharq al-Awsat,* May 14, 2009.

11 Personal interview, senior shaykh, Bakhil Tribal Confederation, Sana`a, Yemen, May 27, 2012.

12 Personal interview, senior provincial security official, Aden, Yemen, May 28, 2012.

13 "Interactive: Fractured Yemen," al-Jazira, June 5, 2012.

14 Personal interview, tribal mediator from Marib Province, Yemen, May 30, 2012, June 1, 2012; personal interview, tribal leader from al-Jawf Province, Yemen, June 1, 2012.

15 Personal interview, resident director, Yemeni non-governmental organization, Sana`a, Yemen, June 2, 2012.

16 "Online Question and Answer Session with Abu Zubayr Adel al-Abab, Shari`a Official for al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula, April 18, 2012," translation by Amany Soliman from the International Center for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence.

17 Personal interview, independent Yemeni researcher, Sana`a, Yemen, May 27, 2012; personal interview, tribal leader from Ibb Province, Sana`a, Yemen, June 1, 2012; personal interview, Yemeni think-tank director, Sana`a, Yemen, June 2, 2012; personal interview, independent Yemeni journalist, Sana`a, Yemen, June 2, 2012.

approach suggests an attempt to shelter AQAP's hard core within a broader, organically derived popular front. As Ansar al-Shari`a leader Jalal Muhsin Balidi al-Murqoshi explained, "We want to implement the Shari`a of Allah in [Abyan] and redress injustices…our goal is to circulate the Islamic model like the Taliban who did justice and provided security [in Afghanistan]."[18]

Empowerment, in turn, comes in the form of economic inducement and public works. Individual recruiting is the primary vehicle. According to tribal leaders from al-Jawf, Lahij, and Marib, Ansar al-Shari`a targets Yemeni youth with the promise of a new rifle, a new car, and salaries as high as $400 per month.[19] The organization reportedly derives these revenues by raiding public institutions, including banks, police garrisons, and government offices.[20] Other sources include tolls charged at checkpoints for "policing" the roads[21] and, to a lesser extent, donations routed through Islamic charities in Saudi Arabia.[22]

Whatever the source of these funds, salaries incentivize recruiting in tangible, sometimes irresistible ways. For unemployed teenagers with little education and even less status, joining the insurgency offers the material and financial trappings of manhood.[23] For underemployed adults, an Ansar al-Shari`a salary provides a means of lifting their families out of poverty. With nearly half of Yemen's population surviving on less than two dollars per day,[24] al-Qa`ida's compensation offers a level of security and sustenance that many tribal leaders cannot provide.[25]

Empowerment also operates at the village or district level. In communities plagued by chronic drought or hunger, tribal elders have reportedly recruited

"In communities plagued by chronic drought or hunger, tribal elders have reportedly recruited fighters for Ansar al-Shari`a in exchange for new wells, new irrigation systems and even food."

fighters for Ansar al-Shari`a in exchange for new wells, new irrigation systems and even food.[26] Current international humanitarian assistance programs do little to disrupt this cycle, with most of the direct aid consumed by refugees in Aden displaced by the fighting in nearby Abyan and Lahij provinces.[27]

Bilateral development assistance programs are similarly problematic. According to one European diplomat, foreigners kidnapped by tribesmen in contested regions like Marib and al-Jawf are now less likely to be ransomed to their governments in the traditional manner and much more likely to be sold to AQAP.[28]

This shift underscores the extent of local desperation and jihadist infiltration in Yemen's rural areas. Yet it also illustrates the influence AQAP exercises through networks of mutual dependency. By conditioning the provision of salaries, public services, and other benefits on loyalty, the syndicate discourages its partners from pursuing alternative sources of patronage.[29] A similar calculus operates among some tribal leaders. By identifying and empowering weak shaykhs in isolated communities, AQAP is able to operate through certain tribal structures without resorting to overt coercion.[30] Instead, the potential loss of status, resources, and influence cements alliances and deters defectors, allowing AQAP to manage tribal equities in a manner that serves its evolving needs.[31]

Ironically, foreign efforts to bolster tribal leaders aggravate rather than mitigate this problem. Supported by generous stipends from Saudi Arabia and enriched by their commercial ties to the Gulf States, tribal confederation leaders and paramount shaykhs are increasingly abandoning their local base for greater proximity to the seat of power in Sana`a.[32] This migration fosters isolation and fragmentation in some districts, effectively removing shaykhs from their traditional role as local benefactors, mediators and, when necessary, military leaders.[33] It also creates resentment, sidelining lesser shaykhs while forcing them to contend with levels of drought, poverty, and population growth that often exceed their own limited resources.[34] Faced with these conditions, accommodating or even allying with AQAP can become the best of several poor options.[35]

Territorial Control
In addition to establishing networks of dependency, AQAP also sets the tribes against themselves. As noted

18 Anis Mansour, "Interview with Jalal Muhsin Balidi al-Murqoshi," Hayat Aden News Agency, January 21, 2012.

19 Personal interview, tribal leader from al-Jawf Province, Sana`a, Yemen, May 30, 2012; personal interview, tribal mediator from Marib Province, Sana`a, Yemen, May 30, 2012; personal interview, tribal leader from Lahij Province, Sana`a, Yemen, June 1, 2012. Sources from Abyan, Hadramawt, and Shabwa provinces also gave similar accounts of Ansar al-Shari`a's local recruiting techniques.

20 Personal interview, independent Yemeni journalist, Aden, Yemen, May 29, 2012.

21 Personal interview, tribal mediator from Marib Province, Sana`a, Yemen, May 30, 2012.

22 Personal interview, former senior People's Democratic Republic of Yemen leader, Aden, Yemen, May 28, 2012; personal interview, Yemeni think-tank director, Sana`a, Yemen, June 2, 2012.

23 Personal interview, tribal leader from Dhamar Province, Sana`a, Yemen, May 30, 2012.

24 "Yemen Country Brief," World Bank, April 2012.

25 Personal interview, tribal leader from Abyan Province, Aden, Yemen, May 28, 2012.

26 Personal interview, tribal mediator from Marib Province, Sana`a, Yemen, May 30, 2012; personal interview, Popular Committee commander from Abyan Province, Sana`a, Yemen, May 31, 2012.

27 Personal interview, Danish Refugee Council official, Sana`a, Yemen, May 31, 2012.

28 Personal interview, German Embassy official, Sana`a, Yemen, May 26, 2012.

29 Personal interview, tribal leader from Lahij Province, Sana`a, Yemen, June 1, 2012.

30 Personal interview, tribal leader from al-Hudaydah Province, Sana`a, Yemen, May 31, 2012.

31 Personal interview, independent Yemeni researcher, Sana`a, Yemen, June 2, 2012.

32 Personal interview, resident director, Yemeni non-governmental organization, Sana`a, Yemen, June 2, 2012.

33 Ibid.

34 Personal interview, tribal leader from al-Hudaydah Province, Sana`a, Yemen, May 27, 2012; personal interview, tribal leader from Shabwa Province, Aden, Yemen, May 28, 2012; personal interview, Popular Committee commander from Abyan Province, Sana`a, Yemen, May 31, 2012.

35 Personal interview, al-Islah Party official from Hadramawt Province, Aden, Yemen, May 28, 2012.

above, efforts to recruit individuals and empower marginal shaykhs circumvent traditional hierarchies, creating alternative sources of power and patronage.[36] Yet at the same time, AQAP actively exploits the prospect of inter-tribal conflict. By deploying members of one tribe into the territory of another, AQAP guarantees that any action against its own forces will be met

> **"Fearful of provoking their stronger neighbors, weaker shaykhs become less likely to challenge AQAP's presence in their traditional sphere of influence."**

with retaliation from its ranks and the victims' own tribesmen.[37] For example, according to one source, nearly 70% of the Ansar al-Shari`a recruits currently fighting in Abyan Province come from central and northern regions like al-Jawf and Marib, and thus have no tribal ties to the region where they currently operate.[38] Similar patterns are also evident in northern Yemen's Sa`da Province, where sources report an influx of young outsiders in the increasingly frequent skirmishes between AQAP and the Zaydi Huthi rebels.[39]

These deployments across provincial and kinship boundaries upset the natural equilibrium among Yemen's tribes. Fearful of provoking their stronger neighbors, weaker shaykhs become less likely to challenge AQAP's presence in their traditional sphere of influence.[40] As a result, many are shifting the burden of securing remote regions to Yemen's fractious transitional

government.[41] The deployments may also increase compliance and unit cohesion. By isolating new recruits from their traditional social and kinship structures, AQAP is enforcing its ideological and operational control.[42]

This forbearance allows AQAP to find sanctuaries, build training camps, and establish *de facto* territorial control.[43] Based from its mountain stronghold at Azzan in Shabwa Province, the movement now operates in at least 12 of Yemen's 21 provinces, including the capital.[44] In some places it even governs, using armed militias and Shari`a courts to prosecute criminals, protect private property, and establish a brutal yet predictable sense of order.[45] In doing so, the movement exhibits a pragmatic approach that has more in common with the Taliban's operations in Afghanistan than it does with Usama bin Ladin's globalized, deterritorialized jihad.[46]

The seizure of Jaar in Abyan Province is a case in point. According to southern leaders, AQAP operated in Abyan's Khanfar district for nearly three years before mounting a coordinated operation.[47] Endemic poverty and the absence of strong tribal structures facilitated these operations, allowing them to develop a measure of sympathy and support within the local population.[48] In March 2011, militants seized the "7th of October" munitions factory near Jaar, carting off cases of ammunition and gunpowder.[49]

Subsequent raids on military garrisons across Abyan Province yielded rockets, mortars, and other small arms, as well as Russian-made armored personnel carriers and T-55 tanks.[50]

Working with these assets, the syndicate established two new training camps—one in a remote agricultural area approximately three miles outside Jaar, and a second in Shokrah, some 19 miles away.[51] According to eyewitness accounts, more than 50 senior AQAP fighters relocated from Azzan to this newly-styled "Emirate of Waqar" in the summer and autumn of 2011. The new stronghold was reportedly so secure that al-Wahayshi and other senior AQAP commanders would commute between Jaar and Azzan on a weekly basis.[52]

The Battle of Zinjibar campaign reflected a similar pattern of resource extraction and territorial consolidation. Supplied from positions in Jaar, an initial force of 300 Ansar al-Shari`a fighters attacked Abyan's provincial capital on May 27, 2011, and seized effective control of the city the following day. As in Jaar and other locations, militants sacked abandoned military and police garrisons, seizing ammunition, heavy weapons, and other military hardware from the army's besieged 25th Mechanized Brigade.[53] They also looted the unguarded provincial bank, carting away billions of Yemeni rials to finance their operations across the country.[54] According to a recent interview with AQAP Commander Jalal al-Beledi, the organization's expenditures in Abyan alone ran nearly $300,000 each month.[55]

The Zinjibar campaign demonstrated AQAP's ability to seize territory and establish effective control, even in the midst of a government counteroffensive.

36 Personal interview, tribal leader from al-Hudaydah Province, Sana`a, Yemen, May 31, 2012; personal interview, Yemeni think-tank director, Sana`a, Yemen, June 2, 2012.

37 Personal interview, tribal leader from Dhamar Province, Sana`a, Yemen, May 30, 2012.

38 Personal interview, Salafist cleric from Lahij Province, Sana`a, Yemen, June 2, 2012.

39 Personal interview, senior Hizb al-Haq Party official, Sana`a, Yemen, June 27, 2012.

40 Ibid.

41 Personal interview, senior provincial security official, Aden, Yemen, May 28, 2012; personal interview, Popular Committee commander from Abyan Province, Sana`a, Yemen, May 31, 2012.

42 Personal interview, tribal leader from Dhamar Province, Sana`a, Yemen, May 30, 2012.

43 Personal interview, Yemeni think-tank director, Sana`a, Yemen, June 2, 2012.

44 "Yemeni Troops Target al-Qaeda," al-Jazira, January 5, 2010.

45 Personal interview, al-Islah Party official from Hadramawt Province, Aden, Yemen, May 29, 2012.

46 For more on this imitation and idealization of the Taliban regime, see Yemeni journalist Abd Illah Haydar Sha`a's interview of Nasir al-Wahayshi, available at www.abdulela.maktoobblog.com.

47 Personal interview, senior Yemen Sons League Party official, Aden, Yemen, May 28, 2012.

48 Personal interview, independent Yemeni journalist, Aden, Yemen, May 29, 2012.

49 "Abyan Explosion Kills Scores," *National Yemen*, March 28, 2011.

50 Personal interview, independent Yemeni journalist, Aden, Yemen, May 29, 2012.

51 Ibid.

52 Personal interview, Salafist cleric from Lahij Province, Sana`a, Yemen, June 2, 2012.

53 Personal interview, senior provincial security official, Aden, Yemen, May 28, 2012.

54 Personal interview, independent Yemeni researcher, Sana`a, Yemen, May 27, 2012; personal interview, independent Yemeni researcher, Sana`a, Yemen, May 31, 2012.

55 Nasser Arrabyee, "Al-Qaeda Threatens to Fight More Effectively from Caves and Mountains," June 14, 2012, available at www.narrabyee-e.blogspot.com.

According to eyewitness reports from within the city, militants established a *da`wa* center to indoctrinate the local population and Shari`a courts to impose justice.[56] From the execution of alleged government collaborators to the public crucifixion of a man accused of homosexuality, AQAP's hierarchy augmented Ansar al-Shari`a's prior emphasis on tribal engagement and economic inducement with a campaign of institutionalized intimidation reminiscent of the Taliban regime.[57] During the spring 2012 Yemeni counteroffensive, however, AQAP withdrew many of its forces to Azzan and adopted more traditional guerrilla tactics[58]—measures designed to retain the propaganda value of their forward presence while preserving their forces in the face of intensified airstrikes and a coordinated assault by five army brigades.[59]

Other AQAP operations suggest a strategy of territorial exclusion. One notable example is the January 2012 seizure of Radda in Bayda Province. Initially the offensive seemed more symbolic than strategic. After looting the bank, flying their flag from the local citadel, and tagging buildings with jihadist graffiti, the militants entered into negotiations with government-appointed mediators and withdrew their forces one week later. The political message was clear, however. With Radda located adjacent to a highway linking Sana`a with eight southern provinces, the operation signaled AQAP's capacity to isolate Yemen's transitional government from the contested southern and western regions where its writ remains weak.[60]

Each of these operations underscores AQAP's home field advantage. Unlike Afghanistan, Pakistan, or other locations on Islam's geographic periphery, AQAP's fighters speak the local language, understand the

local culture, and are grounded in the local society. Even the movement's Saudi members are integrating into Yemeni tribal structures, marrying the daughters of sympathetic tribesmen in a manner recalling the kinship bonds Bin Ladin forged with his Taliban hosts.[61]

The importance of these relationships should not be overstated, however. Although some Western observers view marriage as an instrument for expanding and consolidating political influence,[62] Yemeni sources report that AQAP cadres marry primarily within their own ranks. To the extent that weddings represent a form of coalition-building, the coalitions in question are between the new generation of globalized jihadists, represented by al-Wahayshi and the late Anwar al-`Awlaqi, and Arab Afghan veterans like Tariq al-Fadhli.[63]

Purists and Pragmatists
The fact that men like al-Wahayshi and al-Fadhli would memorialize their alliance through marriage suggests diversity within AQAP and the desire to overcome political, generational, and other differences. Such differences do not diminish the unifying influence of Salafi-jihadi ideology, nor do they disrupt the operational hierarchy between AQAP and its Ansar al-Shari`a subsidiary. Yet they do indicate more nuanced and complex dynamics within the movement itself. Despite AQAP's efforts to present a unitary, undifferentiated front, four discernible elements still persist.

The first element is comprised of ideological purists. Dominated by Saudi nationals, these militants tend to view jihad as an ethical rather than political struggle. As a result, they tend to embrace Bin Ladin's emphasis on provocative operations against high-value targets. The August 27, 2009, assassination attempt against Saudi Interior Minister Prince Muhammad bin Na'if is a case in point. Although the operation failed, bombmaker

Ibrahim Hassan Tali al-Asiri's decision to recruit, train, and sacrifice his own brother demonstrated an unprecedented degree of ruthlessness and resolve.[64] More significantly, it demonstrated a desire to foment revolution through a public, self-negating act. Preoccupied by high rhetoric and high drama, the purists treat Yemen as a staging ground for educating the masses and reviving al-Qa`ida's global operations.

The second element is composed of political pragmatists. Although no less virulent in ideology, its members seek concrete, incremental gains that expand their influence, undermine

> "By deploying members of one tribe into the territory of another, AQAP guarantees that any action against its own forces will be met with retaliation from its ranks and the victims' own tribesmen."

their adversaries, and consolidate their power. Where the purists revere Bin Ladin and emphasize global operations, the pragmatists model their campaign on the Taliban and seek deeper indigenous traction.[65] Latent nationalism may also inform their outlook. According to some local observers, Yemeni nationals who were either born or educated in Saudi Arabia dominate this faction. Although somewhat removed from the rigors of tribal life, they share the belief that Yemen is a prize to be won in its own right.[66]

The third element encompasses Yemen's indigenous Salafists. Some, like al-Fadhli, are veterans of the Soviet-Afghan War with lingering

56 Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, "Al-Qaida's Wretched Utopia and the Battle for Hearts and Minds," *Guardian*, April 30, 2012.

57 Personal interview, independent Yemeni journalist, Aden, Yemen, May 30, 2012.

58 Ibid.

59 Personal interview, former senior People's Democratic Republic of Yemen official, Aden, Yemen, May 28, 2012.

60 Ahmed al-Haj, "Al-Qaeda in Yemen Captures Town South of Capital," Associated Press, January 16, 2012.

61 Personal interview, independent Yemeni researcher, Sana`a, Yemen, June 2, 2012.

62 "Al-Qaeda in Yemen and Somalia: A Ticking Time Bomb," U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, January 21, 2010.

63 Personal interview, independent Yemeni journalist, Aden, Yemen, May 29, 2012.

64 "Prince Mohammed Escapes Assassination Attempt," *Arab News*, August 28, 2009.

65 Personal interview, Yemeni think-tank director, Sana`a, Yemen, June 1, 2012.

66 Christopher Swift, "From Periphery to Core: Foreign Fighters and the Evolution of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula," in *The Foreign Fighter Problem: Recent Trends and Case Studies* (Philadelphia, PA: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2011).

personal and political grievances.[67] Others are allegedly holdovers from the 1994 Yemeni Civil War and, to a lesser extent, the now-defunct Aden Abyan Islamic Army (AAIA).[68] Their numbers also include younger Yemenis, including graduates of al-Zindani's Imam University outside Sana`a.[69] As one alumnus explained, there has long been an intense theological and political debate within Imam University between quietists who seek to restore the caliphate through education and dialogue, and activists compelled to create it by force.[70] Energized by the Arab Spring and radicalized by government crackdowns, students ascribing to the latter view have reportedly left the university for jihad in the south.[71] Among them are tribesmen from al-Zindani's village, al-Arhab, as well as individuals related to prominent Islamist leaders from cities such as Marib and Radda.[72]

The fourth and most unpredictable element is comprised of foreign fighters. According to two independent eyewitness accounts, AQAP stationed between 500 and 600 militants in Jaar prior to its liberation by Yemeni Army forces.[73] Of that number, approximately 10% (or only 50 to 60 men) were foreign nationals. A slightly higher ratio was witnessed in Zinjibar, where foreigners represented between 10 and 20 of the approximately 60 guerrilla fighters remaining in the city near the end of May 2012.[74] In both instances, however, foreign nationals (including Saudis) appear to have represented less than a third of the AQAP or Ansar al-Shari`a forces operating in Abyan Province at any given time.

The foreign fighters' origins are eclectic. Somalis are the largest contingent, reportedly representing at least half of the non-Yemeni jihadists observed by eyewitness sources.[75] Saudis are second, comprising nearly a quarter of AQAP's foreign contingent. The remaining cohort is a mélange. Some sources describe a contingent of Jordanian jihadists migrating from Iraq.[76] Others observed Afghans and Pakistanis, a Nigerian, and a "red faced man" believed to be of Russian or European origin.[77] Other militants from Western backgrounds reportedly included two Frenchmen of North African descent, and one English-speaking convert to Islam.[78] Much like the Saudi purists described above, these deterritorialized militants appear to be fighting for ethical rather than political ends. The Somali contingent is a case in point. Although some analysts posit a strategic alliance between AQAP and al-Shabab,[79] local sources report that Somali fighters in Yemen have generally abandoned the local struggle in Somalia in favor of a more globalized, deterritorialized jihad.[80] Stated differently, these jihadists see themselves as part of a global vanguard, rather than reinforcements from a sympathetic ally.[81] This orientation, however, makes them unsuitable for Ansar al-Shari`a front operations. Respected for their military experience, unit cohesion and ideological tenacity, AQAP reportedly uses its Somali fighters as shock troops, rather than as recruiters within Yemen's tribal population.[82]

The distinctions among factions reveal a degree of dynamism within the wider movement. Although AQAP reportedly imposes a strict hierarchy on its followers—particularly in the ideological and operational domains—its members view their struggle and its objectives in different terms. Saudi purists and foreign fighters likely favor high profile assassination and provocation operations intended for global audiences. They see local gains as a basis for waging global jihad. Yemeni pragmatists and indigenous Salafists, by comparison, emphasize the sort of attritional operations and territorial consolidation aimed at establishing a self-sustaining insurrection. Their goal is to reestablish the caliphate, village by village, district by district.

These strategies are not necessarily in conflict. To the contrary, provocative terror can serve the pragmatists' insurgency, particularly insofar as it disrupts or discredits the Yemeni regime. Moreover, insofar as operations such as the al-Sabin Square bombing achieve both symbolic and attritional objectives, it signals deeper convergence between these two tendencies. The question now is which tendency will prevail, particularly following the Yemeni Army's liberation of Jaar and Zinjibar on June 12, 2012.[83] To the extent that the purists predominate, Yemen will likely witness urban violence directed at government officials, foreign embassies, and other symbols of the nexus between Yemen's transitional government and the "infidel" West. If pragmatism prevails, however, then the insurgency could shift from the southern coastal provinces to rural highlands in a bid to preserve itself—and its influence—for years to come.[84]

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67 Personal interview, Yemeni political analyst and op-position activist, Sana`a, Yemen, May 27, 2012; personal interview, Yemen researcher and al-Islah Party activist, Sana`a, Yemen, May 31, 2012.

68 Personal interview, senior Yemeni Socialist Party official, Aden, Yemen, May 28, 2012.

69 Personal interview, independent Yemeni youth leader, Sana`a, Yemen, May 31, 2012.

70 Personal interview, Salafist cleric from Lahij Province, Sana`a, Yemen, June 2, 2012.

71 Ibid.

72 Personal interview, independent Yemeni political analyst, Sana`a, Yemen, June 1, 2012.

73 Personal interview, independent Yemeni journalist, Aden, Yemen, May 29, 2012; personal interview, Salafist cleric from Lahij Province, Sana`a, Yemen, June 2, 2012.

74 Personal interview, independent Yemeni journalist, Aden, Yemen, May 29, 2012.

75 Personal interview, independent Yemeni journalist, Aden, Yemen, May 29, 2012; personal interview, Salafist cleric from Lahij Province, Sana`a, Yemen, June 2, 2012.

76 Personal interview, independent Italian journalist, Rome, Italy, May 22, 2012; personal interview, tribal leader from Abyan Province, Aden, Yemen, May 28, 2012; personal interview, Popular Committee commander from Abyan Province, Sana`a, Yemen, May 31, 2012.

77 Personal interview, Salafist cleric from Lahij Province, Sana`a, Yemen, June 2, 2012.

78 Personal interview, independent Yemeni journalist, Aden, Yemen, May 29, 2012.

79 Zarif Maseh, "Terror Partnership: AQAP and Shaba'ab," Critical Threats, July 2, 2011.

80 Personal interview, independent Yemeni journalist, Aden, Yemen, May 29, 2012; personal interview, Yemeni think-tank director, Sana`a, Yemen, June 2, 2012.

81 Ibid.

82 Personal interview, independent Yemeni journalist, Aden, Yemen, May 29, 2012.

83 "Army Take Zinjibar, Jaar, the Last Key Stronghold of Militants in South Yemen," Yemen Post, June 12, 2012.

84 Arrabyee.

Los Zetas and MS-13: Nontraditional Alliances

By John P. Sullivan and Adam Elkus

RECOGNIZING THE PARTNERSHIP between the transnational drug trafficking organization Los Zetas and the drug gang Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) is critically important to the security of the Americas. This relationship, however, is generally misunderstood. On one side, the partnership is portrayed as a literal merger of MS-13 and Zetas—an obvious exaggeration of the situation. On the other, the situation is painted as insignificant, and the weight of the links denied. This article suggests that both sides misunderstand the decentralized nature of how both groups operate. It finds that the relationship between the Zetas and MS-13 is an alliance, and one that increases the Zetas' ability to leverage new skills and markets, exploit gaps and vacuums, and extend their reach. It will first profile the Zetas, then examine the nature of their cooperation with MS-13.

Los Zetas

The Zetas started out as an enforcer network for the Gulf Cartel. Composed of 31 mercenaries trained by the Mexican Special Forces (Grupos Aeromoviles de Fuerzas Especiales—GAFES), the Zetas brought advanced tactics, tradecraft, and intelligence skills.[1] In a perverse inversion of the "train the trainer" policy beloved in military and police organizations, the Zetas trained defecting soldiers and police of a lesser caliber. They also expanded their reach by incorporating special operations defectors from the Guatemalan Kaibiles. The Zetas eventually broke from the Gulf Cartel and struck out on their own as an independent drug trafficking cartel. A brutal hierarchical entity, the Zetas now command over "10,000 gunmen from the Rio Grande, on the border with Texas, to deep into Central America."[2] The Zetas' reach extends to the Petén and Alta Verapaz regions of Guatemala where, according to Commissioner for Police Reform Adela de Torrebiarte, "They recruit idle youngsters dubbed *Zetitas* (little Zetas), who stand at street corners and warn them when outsiders enter Zeta territory."[3]

The Zetas are notorious for their barbarization and use of infantry tactics.[4] According to Leonel Aguirre, head of the Sinaloa Humans Rights Defense Commission, they employ "executions, decapitations, the melting of bodies...[They] annihilate and terrorize."[5] In their brutal quest to control a wide range of criminal enterprises, ranging from drug trafficking through kidnapping, counterfeit goods, and petroleum theft, they often wage highly synchronized attacks against their adversaries—rival gangs, police and military alike.

The Zetas have been implicated in some of the drug war's most gruesome crimes. According to journalist Ioan Grillo, "Zetas killers have been arrested for some of the worst atrocities in Mexico's drug war, including the murders of hundreds of people whose bodies have been found in mass graves with alarming frequency, the massacre of 72 foreign migrant workers headed to the United States, and the burning of a casino that claimed 52 lives."[6] Urban blockades, or *narcobloqueos*, are a quasi-political tool recently employed by Los Zetas. Massacres, primitive car bombs, grenade attacks, and assassinations complete their repertoire.[7]

Ambushes and attacks of police are a common Zeta tactic. As a result, police in Nuevo León routinely deploy from barracks and move in convoys to counter the Zeta threat. Zetas also employ a network of spies (*halcones*) to enhance their freedom of movement. One "firefight between Los Zetas' gunmen and the Mexican military left five dead on July 27 [2010], when Los Zetas fought to retain control over a PEMEX well near Ciudad Mier, Tamaulipas. The petro theft constitutes a symbolic and a financial threat to the Mexican government while providing a vast stream of income, perhaps as much as $715 million a year, that gangsters use to buy weapons, bribe officials, and bankroll their brutal assault against the Mexican government."[8]

Mara Salvatrucha-13

MS-13, on the other hand, is a less cohesive, highly networked entity. While both the Zetas and MS-13 employ extreme violence, that is where the similarities end. A network of gangs with reach from Los Angeles to New York to Guatemala and El Salvador, MS-13 emerged in Los Angeles. Often portrayed as a consequence of the destabilizing effect of Central American civil wars during the 1980s, it is actually a byproduct of urban gang dynamics. Founded by Salvadorans living in Los

> "As the Zetas continue to expand, they will require new methods of distribution, and retail gangs such as MS-13 are certainly one means to accomplish this growth."

Angeles, MS-13 operates in 42 states and the District of Columbia in the United States and throughout Central America. Unlike the Zetas, MS-13 lacks a cohesive organizational structure. MS-13 is essentially a network of individual "cliques" that communicate and collaborate with each other based upon relationships of influence.[9]

It should not be taken from this, however, that there is no concept of hierarchy within MS-13. Hierarchy and order, even if implicit, exists among the most amorphous of groups. As can be seen in the current gang "truce" in Guatemala, regional groupings can exercise power.[10] Moreover, a concept

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

2 Ioan Grillo, "Mexico: Zetas Rewrite Drug War in Blood," *Vancouver Sun*, May 29, 2012.

3 Julie López, "The Zetas' Bad Omen," *ReVista* (Winter 2012).

4 John P. Sullivan and Adam Elkus, "Tactics and Operations in the Mexican Drug War," *Infantry* 100:4 (2011).

5 Quoted in Tracy Wilkenson, "Sinaloa Cartel, Zetas Push Mexico's Drug Violence to New Depths," *Los Angeles Times*, May 27, 2012.

6 Grillo.

7 John P. Sullivan and Samuel Logan, "Los Zetas: Massacres, Assassinations and Infantry Tactics," *The Counter Terrorist* 3:6 (2010/2011).

8 Ibid.

9 For a detailed history of MS-13 and its operations, see Samuel Logan, *This is for the Mara Salvatrucha: Inside the MS-13, America's Most Violent Gang* (New York: Hyperion, 2009).

10 Hannah Stone, "El Salvador Gangs Confirm Truce,"

of common identity exists throughout MS-13 that binds together disparate cliques in a mode of cooperation. As Sullivan and Logan observed:[11]

MS-13's network configuration frustrates many law enforcement officers looking for a hierarchical organization that they can penetrate. The lack of an overt, formalized hierarchy, manifested through decentralization and the apparent absence of a clear hierarchy or structure, is often interpreted as a lack of sophistication, or a lack of capacity. That is not the case. There is indeed a hierarchy, but it is a "hierarchy of influence" where "respect" and loyalties are expressed through a networked structure.

In operational terms, the "hierarchy of respect" is expressed through a web of social relationships within individual cliques and social/business relationships between cliques. At the clique level, leadership is distributed. There are two primary leaders, the "first word" (*primera palabra*) and the "second word" (*segunda palabra*) who operate something like a commander and an executive officer in military settings. The *segunda palabra* from large, powerful cliques often exerts influence over smaller or subordinate cliques. In many facets, this leadership is neo-feudal, where leadership is determined by fealty to a leader who collects taxes and the support of warriors and in turn offers protection. Order and control are exercised through a variety of communications (including meetings and the targeted use of violence as an enforcement measure).

This decentralized structure allows individual nodes (or cliques) to operate with relative freedom. Within its own area of influence, each clique is allowed to run local operations (as long as "respect" is provided and

taxes paid).[12] This entrepreneurial ethos is a characteristic of loosely-coupled networked gangs with broad geographic reach. MS-13 developed this structure as it spread across the United States and into Central America. This loose-coupling does not mean that individual cliques have complete autonomy. Each clique must

> **"The Zetas are believed to have established cells in Laredo, Dallas and Houston and have allegedly conducted at least eight murders on U.S. soil to date."**

demonstrate loyalty to the overarching gang and respect to influential cliques and their leaders. Enforcing fealty is a brutal process and is simply expressed in the gang's informal motto, "Mata, Controla, Viola" (kill, control and rape).[13]

MS-13 is distinguished from other large, hierarchical gangs in the way its modular structure allows it to intersect with larger drug markets and interact with drug cartels. In Mexico, MS-13 serves as foot soldiers (contractors or tactical allies) for cartels (including the Zetas) and facilitators for the human trafficking trade (a skill they learned when moving their own deported members back to the United States).[14]

MS-13's neo-feudal structure helps it adapt to shifting alliances and rivalries while leaving it free to exploit local opportunities. MS-13 is involved in drug distribution, robbery, prostitution, theft, human trafficking, and provides assassins for hire to other transnational drug cartels.[15]

Assessing the MS-13-Zeta Alliance

In 2012, various news reports[16] warned that "an alliance between the Zetas cartel and Mara Salvatruchas street gang will pose a major challenge for law officers who are battling the Mexican drug cartels."[17] Insight Crime discounted these as unfounded, assessing the "alliance" as apocryphal and unsubstantiated. The Insight assessment looked at why the Zetas would or would not want to ally with MS-13: [18]

There are reasons why the Zetas, and other large criminal organizations, might want to work with maras and, in some cases, do. Foot soldiers: As the AP [Associated Press] article rightly points out, the maras are numerous. Territory: Mara numbers allow them to occupy territory, something the Zetas are also interested in, and much of it valuable urban territory where lucrative extortion and micro-trafficking activities take place. Propensity for violence: Maras are known to carry out brutal acts without remorse. Hierarchical structure: Maras have some ability to direct large numbers in unison. Intelligence: Large numbers means many eyes and ears.

However, there are many reasons why the Zetas would never integrate gangs into their enterprise. Discipline: Maras are notoriously undisciplined and unprofessional. Loyalty: Maras' loyalty is to their gang, not the Zetas. Lack of training: Maras do not know how to handle assault weapons. Lack of anonymity: Maras are visible, obvious, and frequently the easiest target for security officials.

It should be understood, therefore, that MS-13 and the Zetas joining together is not equivalent to a signed treaty that

Insight Crime, March 23, 2012.

11 John P. Sullivan and Samuel Logan, "MS-13: Networks of Influence," *The Counter Terrorist* 3:4 (2010).

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.

16 Romina Ruiz-Goiriena, "Mara Salvatrucha, Zetas Joining Forces? Guatemala Authorities See Disturbing Evidence," Associated Press, April 7, 2012.

17 Diana Washington Valdez, "Zetas Cartel-Mara Salvatruchas Alliance in Mexico Unites Brutal Gangs," *El Paso Times*, April 15, 2012.

18 Steven Dudley, "Reports of Zetas-MS-13 Alliance in Guatemala Unfounded," Insight Crime, April 17, 2012.

facilitates formal cooperation between two groups. It is not known how such a deal was conducted, but it is sure to be something other than a literal declaration of fealty. Rather, what the Zetas gain from such a loose agreement or understanding is the ability to conduct business with cliques on a continent-wide basis. While there is no explicit hierarchical central leadership within MS-13 and alliances are likely negotiated at the individual clique level, consensus among cliques throughout the gang are necessary to sustain the relationship. Key cliques in Los Angeles and San Salvador would exert a great deal of persuasion in this regard.

Several points used to dismiss MS-13 involvement are easily discounted. Extreme violence is no barrier since that is a shared trait; lack of anonymity likely applies equally to both groups. Lack of weapons training is easily mitigated, and loyalty can be bought or coerced in the short-term.

The importance of such a deal should not be underestimated. As the Zetas continue to expand, they will require new methods of distribution, and retail gangs such as MS-13 are certainly one means to accomplish this growth. The Zetas also need an ability to fill power vacuums created by cartel struggles. MS-13 also allows the Zetas to provide personnel to operate in new markets, some of which may have been previously out of reach due to lack of geographical penetration. Having a "plug and play" ability to do business with the wide affinity network MS-13 has built up will certainly be a resource for the Zetas. This advantage could be extended to other gangs and cartels. Indeed, gang alliances are often short-term, shifting arrangements. While individual cliques may locally align with competing factions, these relationships are volatile as the gang's network will seek to eliminate alliances that interfere with the gang's overarching identity and business interests. Essentially, local alliances are permitted to the extent they do not compete with the network's ability to function as a whole.

Gangs as Cartel Foot Soldiers

The Zetas are believed to have established cells in Laredo, Dallas and Houston and have allegedly conducted at least eight murders on U.S. soil to date.[19] In addition to operating on their own, they rely on gangs for local operations. MS-13 is not the only U.S. gang working with cartels. Other gangs mentioned in this context include Eighteenth Street (M-18), Barrio Azteca, Partido Revolucionario Mexicano, the Texas Syndicate,[20] and the Mexicles and Artistas.[21] San Diego's Logan Heights (Calle 30) gang, which carried out the assassination of Cardinal Juan Jesús Posadas Ocampo, worked with the Arellano-Félix Organization in Tijuana.[22] As Mónica Ortiz Uribe noted in a Fronteras news report, "To transport their drugs inside the United States, Mexican drug cartels want a distributor who operates within the black market and is familiar with life on America's streets. That's where American gangs step in. The two make a convenient alliance."[23] Alliances among gangs can be both domestic and transnational, and gangs can be both territorial and transactional.

Conclusion

Interaction and cooperation among criminal enterprises can benefit both parties involved. A Zetas-MS-13 alliance offers many benefits—including profit and plunder. Rather than viewing such an alliance as a merger, however, it is more accurate to view it as a limited joint venture. Alliances can also be protean, changing as members gain or lose prominence, become engaged in personal conflicts, or get a better offer that promises more profit or power.[24]

The endpoint for such an alliance would be an addition to what the Zetas already possess: a powerful network of gangs and cartels. Observers dismiss this deal and its ramifications because the hybrid organization created would not be a strictly traditional foe. Yet the Zetas themselves have voted with their wallets: MS-13 gives them an agility, responsiveness, and adaptability that they currently lack. This greater reach would be a force multiplier not only against already beleaguered Latin American law enforcement, but also against U.S. law enforcement personnel. The Zetas would be able to operate throughout a greater area in the United States and elbow aside local competitors.

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19 Grillo.

20 Prison gangs offer cartels the advantage of extreme coercion since they can enforce their will upon gangsters inside and outside of prison. See Jason Buch, "Cartels Cooperate with Prison Gangs," *Houston Chronicle*, January 2, 2012.

21 Valdez.

22 Sebastian Rotella, "Cardinal's Slaying Had Ties to San Diego Barrio," *Los Angeles Times*, July 4, 1993.

23 Mónica Ortiz Uribe, "U.S. Gangs As Foot Soldiers For Drug Traffickers," Fronteras, May 25, 2012.

24 See, for example, this synopsis of MS-13 and M-18 activity in Honduras: "Honduras: Areas of operation of Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Mara 18 (M-18) (also known as the 18th Street gang) in Honduras; domestic and transnational networks; nature of any alliances and whether the maras dispute territory; violence perpetrated by gang members against other gang members

(2009-December 2011)," Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, February 3, 2012.

The Evolution of an American Jihadi: The Case of Omar Hammami

By Christopher Anzalone

OMAR HAMMAMI, WHO was until mid-March 2012 the most prominent foreign fighter in the ranks of the Somali insurgent-jihadist movement al-Shabab, has never been shy of being in the limelight. He emerged as the English-speaking, Western face of al-Shabab's recruitment of foreign fighters following an interview from the field in October 2007 with the Arabic satellite news channel al-Jazira and continues to be the subject of intense Western media interest even after his public break with al-Shabab on March 16, 2012, in a video posted to YouTube.[1]

In May 2012, Hammani released the first part of his autobiography describing his experiences before and after traveling to civil war-torn Somalia.[2] The first part of the autobiography, totaling 127 pages, was released as a document upload to the Scribd website in mid-May after its release was teased a week earlier by "somalimuhajirwarrior"[3] in a comment left on the original YouTube video.[4] In a footnote, Hammami also revealed that he produced written work as an online jihadist writer using the pseudonym "Abu Jihad al-Shami," specifically four written volumes totaling nearly 300 pages.[5] This work stands in contrast to the widely-ridiculed jihadist rap songs

for which he was previously known and shows an attempt by the Alabama-native to evolve from simply being another "mujahid" on the battlefield to a respected jihadist strategist and ideologue along the lines of individuals such as Abu Mus`ab al-Suri, whom he openly admires.

This article examines both Hammami's career in al-Shabab, paying particular attention to the debate over his exact position within it, and his strategic writings under the pen name "Abu Jihad al-Shami." Drawing from Hammami's writings, including his autobiography, the article seeks to provide a detailed analytical profile of one of the most famous and prolific Western jihadist foreign fighters, contributing to the existing literature on the development of jihadist strategic studies[6] and the Muslim foreign fighter phenomenon.[7]

The Road to Somalia and Al-Shabab

After living in Egypt for a brief period of time, during which he tried and failed to enroll at al-Azhar University, the prestigious Sunni center of religious learning located in Cairo,[8] Hammami left for Somalia in November 2006 using the pretext of looking for work in Dubai.[9] He traveled to the East African country to support the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), an umbrella movement that brought together local Shari`a courts and a diverse array of Somali Islamist actors and successfully established a brief period of relative peace in much of central and southern Somalia during the second half of 2006 before being overthrown by an Ethiopian invasion in late December of that year.[10] In his

autobiography, Hammami blamed the ICU's military failures on several factors, including the "tribal" mindset of some of its leaders—specifically naming Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmad and Hawiye clan leaders—and overreach by attempting to seize control of more territory than the ICU's "fledgling army" was capable of realistically controlling at that time.[11] His experiences in 2006-2007 had a profound effect on him, as represented in his strong opposition later to premature expansion and the use of conventional military tactics over guerrilla warfare in spite of jihadists' technological and numerical disadvantages vis-à-vis their enemies.[12]

After the outbreak of guerrilla warfare by al-Shabab and other Somali Islamist insurgent groups following the Ethiopian invasion, Hammami eventually moved away from the armed faction led by Hasan al-Turki following political and strategic disputes and toward al-Shabab, which emerged in 2007 as a movement independent from the ICU.[13]

Hammami in Al-Shabab's Media Campaign

Despite the attention he receives in Western media, Hammami's exact position and role in al-Shabab is debated and unclear. The U.S. Department of the Treasury, in its designation of Hammami as an international terrorist, described him as a "military tactician, recruitment strategist, and financial manager" for the Somali insurgent movement and accused him specifically of planning the October 2008 suicide bombing carried out by U.S. citizen and

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1 In the 1:10-minute video posted by user "somalimuhajirwarrior," Hammami, sitting in a room with a bare wall with the black-and-white flag used by al-Shabab hanging in the background, issued an "urgent message" to "whoever it [the message] may reach among the Muslims," saying that he feared for his life following a break with al-Shabab over "differences" in matters of "Shari`a and strategy." See Omar Hammami, "urgentmessage," video message, March 16, 2012.

2 Abu Mansuur al-Amriiki, *The Story of an American Jihaadi: Part One*, May 2012, available at www.scribd.com/doc/93732117/The-Story-of-an-American-Jihaadi.

3 The user name translates to "Somali emigrant-warrior." In this context, the term refers to travel from one's homeland to one of the "lands of jihad."

4 The original document was uploaded to Scribd by user "Abu Muhammad al-Somali."

5 Ibid. The autobiography is not paginated and the page numbers referenced in this article are taken from the page numbers of the PDF version of the document when it is opened.

6 Study of "jihadist strategic studies" was pioneered by Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer in their article "Jihadi Strategic Studies: The Alleged Al Qaida Policy Study Preceding the Madrid Bombings," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27:5 (2004).

7 Thomas Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad," *International Security* 35:3 (2010); Thomas Hegghammer, "The Foreign Fighter Phenomenon: Islam and Transnational Militancy," Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University, February 2011.

8 Al-Amriiki, *The Story of an American Jihaadi*, pp. 29, 32-33.

9 Andrea Elliott, "The Jihadist Next Door," *New York Times Magazine*, January 27, 2010.

10 See Christof Putzel's interviews with Hammami's former best friend, Bernie Culveyhouse, in the 2010 Van-

guard TV documentary *American Jihadi*.

11 Al-Amriiki, *The Story of an American Jihaadi*, p. 58. He also criticized the ICU's treatment of foreign fighters in a short treatise, "A Message to the Beloved Mujahideen Specifically and the Muslims Generally," dated January 8, 2008, and released by al-Shabab's media department and distributed on jihadist internet forums by the Global Islamic Media Front.

12 He warned against premature expansion beyond jihadists' current capabilities in one of the strategic monographs he penned as Abu Jihad al-Shami, *The Vision of the Jihadi Movement & the Strategy for the Current Stage*, pp. 18, 23. In another work, *A Strategy for the Land of the Gathering (Syria): An Attempt to Pinpoint the Pivotal Aspects*, he advised Syrian rebels to stick to guerrilla tactics against the larger and more technologically-advance and well-equipped Syrian military and security forces.

13 Al-Amriiki, *The Story of an American Jihaadi*, pp. 94-98.

fellow foreign fighter Shirwa Ahmed in Puntland. The picture based on al-Shabab primary sources, however, is at best ambiguous and short on specifics.

In insurgent statements and videos in which he appears or is mentioned, Hammami has been referred to in three ways: *al-akh*,[14] *shaykh*,[15] and *al-qa'id al-maydani*.[16] The first translates to "the brother" and is simply a term of endearment used by some Muslims to refer to a fellow male Muslim. The second is an honorific title denoting a leader, either religious or societal; however, the term is used by jihadists so frequently and generally that its meaning is of limited value by itself with

"Hammami's foray into strategic writings, although not entirely convincing, has resulted in works that are not as easily dismissed as his rap songs."

regards to determining an individual's specific position in an organization. The third translates to "field commander" and the statement describes Hammami's role in leading military operations in the Bay and Bakool regions of Somalia.

In his autobiography, Hammami described meeting some of al-Shabab's founding leaders upon their arrival in the port town of Barawa in southern Somalia after leaving the forces of Hasan al-Turki.[17] Hammami said he met al-Shabab leaders Ahmed "Mukhtar Abu al-Zubayr" Godane, Ibrahim al-Afghani, Mukhtar "Abu Mansur" Robow, Adan Hashi 'Ayro, and Fu'ad Muhammad Khalaf "Shongole."[18] Hammami also appeared alongside Robow in an al-Shabab video, *Ambush at Bardale*, released in March 2009 that showed the planning and execution of military operations aimed at besieging

the city of Baidoa.[19] Hammami has also appeared several times at public al-Shabab events. The highest profile of these was a conference the insurgent movement held in mid-May 2011 in the Lower Shabelle region following the killing of Usama bin Ladin in Pakistan. Entitled "We Are All Usama," the conference was attended and featured speeches by Hammami and a number of senior al-Shabab leaders.[20]

Hammami has appeared in three official videos produced by al-Shabab's media department: *Ambush at Bardale*, a brief appearance in *Labbayk Ya Usama*, released in September 2009, and an April 2010 video of a celebration for children of insurgents who were killed in battle. Two of his rap songs were featured in *Ambush at Bardale* but subsequent ones were attributed to "Ghaba Productions" and released independently of al-Shabab's media department.[21] The last publicly-released, full lecture by him before his public break with al-Shabab, entitled *Lessons Learned*, was released independently on YouTube and the Ansar al-Mujahidin English jihadist internet forum on October 7, 2011, and was later translated by the media department of the Shumukh al-Islam jihadist internet forum and released a month later.

Public Break with Al-Shabab
Hammami did not fully elaborate on his specific disputes with al-Shabab, either in the March 2012 YouTube video or since his first media communication after it was posted.[22] In a subsequent interview, Hammami's self-described "PR rep," Abu Muhammad al-Somali, who claims to run both the "somalimuhajirwarrior" YouTube account and the affiliated Twitter account "abuamerican,"[23]

suggested that violent internal discord in al-Shabab was at the heart of the Alabama native's disputes with the group.[24]

In the interview, al-Somali, who may in fact just be Hammami, highlighted several passages in the first part of Hammami's autobiography, which was uploaded to Scribd by al-Somali in mid-May.[25] Written under the American's

"The ultimate goal of the jihadist movement, according to Hammami, is global."

more well-known *nom de guerre*, Abu Mansur al-Amriki, it documented, in a narrative style similar to his sometimes goofy and juvenile spoken style, his life from childhood to his early years as a foreign fighter in Somalia. It is unclear whether al-Somali is in fact Hammami, although al-Somali has denied being Hammami on Twitter and in e-mail correspondence.[26]

Hammami as a Jihadist Strategist
In the first footnote of his autobiography, Hammami revealed that he is Abu Jihad al-Shami, an online jihadist strategic writer whose real identity was previously unclear.[27] Using this pen name, he produced four strategic studies monographs that sought to both provide guidance and stir debate among jihadists as well as "remind Muslims" of the place of strategy in Islamic history.[28] He frequently referenced traditional Muslim biographical accounts (*sira*) of the Prophet Muhammad's life throughout his original three-part series on strategic thought: *An Islamic Guide to Strategy*,[29] *A*

14 "Celebration for the Children of the Martyrs," al-Shabab, April 2010.

15 *Ambush at Bardale*, al-Shabab, March 2009.

16 Al-Shabab statement, August 8, 2008.

17 A specific date is not given.

18 Al-Amriiki, *The Story of an American Jihaadi*, p. 99.

19 *Ambush at Bardale*.

20 Christopher Anzalone, "Harakat al-Shabab in Somalia Hold Conference to Eulogize Usama bin Laden, American Member Omar Hammami Present," Views from the Occident Blog, May 11, 2011.

21 Christopher Anzalone, "The End of a Romance? The Rise and Fall of an American Jihadi: Omar Hammami's Relationship with Somalia's Al-Shabab," al-Wasat Blog, March 17, 2012.

22 Christof Putzel, "American al-Qaida Member and FBI Target Still Alive and Talks Exclusively to Current," Current, May 16, 2012.

23 The Twitter account is accessible at https://twitter.com/#!/abuamerican.

24 J.M. Berger, "Me Against the World," *Foreign Policy*, May 25, 2012.

25 Al-Amriiki, *The Story of an American Jihaadi*.

26 In e-mail correspondence with terrorism researcher J.M. Berger, al-Somali denied being Hammami. Al-Somali also refers to Hammami in the third person when speaking about him on Twitter.

27 Al-Amriiki, *The Story of an American Jihaadi*, p. 2.

28 Abu Jihad al-Shami, *An Islamic Guide to Strategy*, pp. 3, 127.

29 Much of this monograph is lifted whole cloth from several U.S. military training manuals and other books,

Strategic Study of the Prophetic Sirah, and *The Vision of the Jihadi Movement & the Strategy for the Current Stage*.[30] He later wrote a fourth strategic study in which he tried to apply his previous strategic maxims to the ongoing conflict in Syria, *A Strategy for the Land of the Gathering (Syria): An Attempt to Pinpoint the Pivotal Aspects*.[31] Hammami's foray into strategic writings, although not entirely convincing, has resulted in works that are not as easily dismissed as his rap songs.[32]

At its core, Hammami's ideological arguments are simple and straightforward, with little room for nuance or debate. Shari`a, or Islamic law, which he described as being uncontested, must be the guiding basis of the contemporary jihadist movement.[33] Indeed, he argued that the historical roots of the use of strategy lay in the *sira* of the Prophet Muhammad and the Shari`a itself.[34] The goal of the jihadist movement, he argued, must be the complete implementation of Islamic law as he interpreted it. He was unabashedly critical of its "halfway" implementation using the disingenuous excuse of protecting the public interest (*maslaha*).[35] The failure to fully implement Shari`a is because of a lack of trust in God (*tawwakul 'ala Allah*).[36]

The writ of jihadist Shari`a must, Hammami argued, be extended until it encompasses the entire world. This is necessitated by the obligations of maintaining belief in the absolute unity of God (*tawhid*), upholding the

Shari`a, and safeguarding the welfare of Muslims.[37] Islam, as a total system of life, must be followed to the exclusion of everything else.[38] Hammami identified three ways by which this is achieved: missionary propagation (*da`wa*), getting non-Muslims to convert to Islam or, if they are from the People of the Book,[39] pay the *jizya* poll tax, or if this fails,

> ## "Glocalized militancy, which uses global rhetoric while maintaining a primarily local operational focus, is what Hammami believed is the most serious problem facing the jihadist movement."

through "outright warfare."[40] *Da`wa* is not only aimed at non-Muslims but also Muslims, who must be properly educated and prepared for the advent of the caliphate. It is the duty of local jihadist authorities to undertake this education program over the communities they rule.[41]

The ultimate goal of the jihadist movement, according to Hammami, is global, as he outlined most explicitly in the third installment of the series, *The Vision of the Jihadi Movement & Strategy for the Current Stage*. In his view, however, the mujahidin have not made the formation of a new caliphate their main goal because they have failed to truly understand "the vision and [grand] strategy" as he envisioned it.[42] This misunderstanding is manifested in several ways. First, some jihadists simply want to inflict damage on their enemies, the "disbelievers" (*kuffar*), even to the detriment of achieving the

ultimate goal of the caliphate, thus "confusing strategy [damaging the *kuffar*] with [the ultimate] vision [the caliphate]."[43] Second, anti-occupation struggles in places such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and the Palestinian Territories have become the focus of many jihadist groups to the detriment of the true globalization of these localized conflicts. Anti-occupation struggles can thus actually distract Muslims from working toward what should be the ultimate goal, the caliphate.[44] The establishment of local "safe havens," Hammami reminded his readers, is only meant to enable the building up of an infrastructure for the caliphate. Local jihadist emirates are only meant to lead to the establishment of a single "Islamic state."[45] Glocalized militancy, which uses global rhetoric while maintaining a primarily local operational focus, is what Hammami believed is the most serious problem facing the jihadist movement. It is a view shared by his purported "PR rep," Abu Muhammad al-Somali.[46]

Later intentions of jihadists to "go global" are often never realized, leading Hammami to be skeptical of a "local-to-global" strategy.[47] The globalization, he wrote, often never truly happens. Many movements that once had global or pan-Islamic visions, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, have been led astray by the localization of goals and operations, he wrote.[48] Thus, Muslims should beware of becoming hypocrites by speaking about the caliphate and then not actually working toward its establishment.[49] The concept of hypocrisy (*nifaq*) is a powerful one with deep historical roots in the Qur'an and prophetic *sira*.[50]

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the titles of which Hammami noted in the introduction but did not fully cite in the actual text.

30 Al-Shami, *An Islamic Guide to Strategy*, p. 11.

31 Al-Shami, *A Strategy for the Land of the Gathering (Syria)*, p. 10.

32 Hammami offered oral analysis in a lecture entitled "In Defense of the Khilaafa," which was released in full on May 25, 2012, but parts of which were released, and then quickly removed, online in January 2012. The author credits J.M. Berger for bringing this initial release to his attention as well as for sharing this version of the lecture. In the lecture, Hammami provided both an analysis of Western counterterrorism studies and used it to make an argument for the need for a caliphate.

33 Al-Shami, *An Islamic Guide to Strategy*, pp. 1-2; Al-Shami, *The Vision of the Jihadi Movement*, p. 7.

34 See, for example, Al-Shami, *An Islamic Guide to Strategy*, p. 2; Abu Jihad al-Shami, *A Strategic Study of the Prophetic Sirah*, pp. 39-41, 51-52.

35 Al-Shami, *A Strategic Study of the Prophet Sirah*, p. 20.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., p. 33.

38 Ibid., p. 34, fn 43.

39 The "People of the Book" (*Ahl al-Kitab*) are generally believed by Muslims to have received revealed scriptures from God, although it is believed they have since corrupted some of its original message. This group includes Christians and Jews.

40 Al-Shami, *A Strategic Study of the Prophetic Sirah*, p. 33.

41 Al-Shami, *The Vision of the Jihadi Movement*, pp. 15-18.

42 Ibid., pp. 10-11.

43 Ibid., p. 11.

44 Ibid., pp. 11-12.

45 Ibid., pp. 15-16.

46 Twitter conversation between the author and Abu Muhammad al-Somali, available at https://twitter.com/abumamerican/status/204585777773031427.

47 Al-Shami, *The Vision of the Jihadi Movement*, pp. 12-15.

48 Ibid., p. 14.

49 Ibid., p. 15.

50 For a straightforward discussion of the historically symbolic importance of the concept of *nifaq*, see Robert Wisnovsky, "Beyond Jihad: What We Can Learn from the Religious Language of Terrorists," *Slate*, October 23, 2001.

Hammami warned that localized jihadist states, or "emirates," may actually lead to increased disunity because of local differences and contradictory local strategies and conflicting policies that would ultimately derail the caliphate project.[51] Even in Iraq, the seat of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), the jihadist movement is not unified since al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI) and the ISI have failed to convince other jihadist groups, such as Ansar al-Islam, to join the fold.[52] Due to the lack of unity among the jihadist groups in Iraq, Hammami argued against the seat of the caliphate being established there, expressing serious reservations about the country's suitability as a safe haven and base.[53] Instead, Hammami suggested the Arabian Peninsula and specifically Yemen as the best candidate for the jihadist movement's chief base of operations in the campaign to found a new caliphate because of the strength of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula and its close proximity to Somalia, which he described as the "land of the mujahidin."[54] What is needed, he wrote, is a single leader (caliph) to whom all local jihadist groups swear allegiance (*bay`a*).[55] Despite recognizing the potential pitfalls in establishing numerous localized states, namely the outbreak of discord due to local differences, Hammami did not seem to recognize that this likely poses an even bigger threat to the full globalization of the jihadist movement that he seeks.

Conclusion

Hammami's collective works, namely his autobiography and strategic writings, are among the most extensive available from a Western jihadist in terms of providing personal details about his experiences, such as his journey to the battlefield, and ideological development.[56] On the one hand, his writings and lectures are anecdotal and not verifiable, telling the story of one young man's trajectory from the small Alabama city of Daphne to the battlefields of Somalia, just one of many Americans who have joined the ranks of al-Shabab. His writings and lectures also, however, collectively provide an account, rare in its amount of detail, on the ideological development and radicalization of one of the most prominent Western jihadist foreign fighters as well as on the formative days of al-Shabab as it emerged in 2007 and 2008 as a movement separate from the ICU.

Hammami's writings call into question previous arguments about his radicalization and recruitment into al-Shabab. His ambitions to be a respected and even controversial jihadist strategist, as expressed in his writings and lectures, suggest that his radicalization was not solely the result of his attraction to the battlefield in Somalia. Rather, he sought to gain an audience that was much larger than simply members, supporters, and sympathizers of a single militant movement. His goal was to produce written material integral to the success of jihadists globally in the war of ideas.

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The Holsworthy Barracks Plot: A Case Study of an Al-Shabab Support Network in Australia

By Andrew Zammit

IN AUGUST 2009, Australian security agencies foiled an al-Shabab associated plot to attack Holsworthy Army Barracks in Sydney. Codenamed Operation Neath, the counterterrorism operation disrupted the mass-shooting plot in its early stages.[1] Five men were charged, and three—Wissam Fattal, Saney Edow Aweys and Nayef el-Sayed—were convicted of planning to attack the barracks. The men had sought weapons, dispatched others for training, conducted reconnaissance of Holsworthy Barracks and asked senior al-Shabab religious figures in Somalia for permission to attack Australian targets.[2]

The Holsworthy Barracks incident marks one of the few al-Shabab associated plots in the West, yet it has received little attention by analysts and scholars.[3] The trial concluded in December 2011, with some court material becoming publicly available in April 2012. This article draws on the recently released material to provide a case study of how an internal threat emerged from what began as a diaspora-based support network for an external insurgency. In this case, the transformation did not occur through overseas instigation or online radicalization, but through the involvement of non-diaspora-based ideological sympathizers, socially linked to an earlier cell, determined on revenge, and restricted from traveling abroad. This article shows that while the Somali connection was new, the plot developed through processes characteristic of Australia's jihadist scene, which has tended to be small, interlinked and closely-monitored.

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51 Al-Shami, *The Vision of the Jihadi Movement*, pp. 13-14.
52 Ibid., p. 26.
53 Ibid.; Al-Shami, *A Strategy for the Land of the Gathering (Syria)*, p. 10.
54 Al-Shami, *The Vision of the Jihadi Movement*, pp. 25-26.
55 Ibid., p. 28.
56 Other notable personal accounts from Western jihadists include those of Adam Gadahn, Anwar al-`Awlaqi, Samir Khan, Yassin and Mounir Chouka, Eric Breininger, and Donald Maldonado.

1 Daniel Fogarty and Steve Lillebuen, "Extremists Jailed for 'Evil' Terror Plot," *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 16, 2011.
2 Ian Munro, "Terror on Tap," *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 24, 2010.
3 Exceptions include Raffaello Pantucci, "Operation Neath: Is Somalia's al-Shabaab Movement Active in Australia?" *Terrorism Monitor* 9:3 (2011); Leah Farrall, "What the al Shabab-al Qaeda Merger Means for Australia," *The Conversation*, March 5, 2012.

Development of Australian Jihadism

Jihadist activity occurred in Australia prior to the Holsworthy Barracks plot. There was an unsuccessful al-Qa`ida and Jemaah Islamiyya (JI)-directed conspiracy to bomb Israeli and Jewish targets during the 2000 Sydney Olympics, a Lashkar-i-Tayyiba (LeT)-guided plot that was foiled in 2003, and self-starting cells arrested in Melbourne and Sydney in 2005's Operation Pendennis. Clusters of aspiring Australian jihadists had also traveled for training or combat overseas, chiefly to Afghanistan and Pakistan from 1999-2003, Lebanon throughout the 2000s, Somalia from 2007 onwards, and there are also some indications of travel for jihad in Yemen.[4]

The Somali cluster was the precursor to the Holsworthy Barracks plot. In 2007, the Australian Federal Police launched Operation Rochester to investigate reports of Somali-Australians traveling to fight for al-Shabab against the Ethiopian-backed Transitional Federal Government. That investigation ended because not enough evidence could be gathered to press charges. Operation Neath began in February 2009 as another investigation into al-Shabab support, with around 20 people—including Aweys, Fattal and el-Sayed—suspected of assisting the Somali jihadist movement. By 2009, this small support network had expanded beyond the Somali diaspora to include people of other backgrounds, mainly from Middle Eastern countries who lacked the nationalist element in their motivation.[5] Of the three convicted in the Holsworthy Barracks plot, only Saney Aweys, the key link to al-Shabab, was from the Somali diaspora; Wissam Fattal and Nayef el-Sayed were of Lebanese descent.[6]

Phone intercepts between Aweys and shaykhs in Somalia suggested that el-Sayed and Fattal conceived the plan and had strong social links to the cell arrested in Melbourne during the 2005 Operation Pendennis raids.[7] Often those involved in jihadist plots worldwide have also featured on the periphery of earlier investigations, as was the case in the London and Madrid attacks, and this has tended to be the case in Australia's small jihadist scene as well.[8] For example, the earlier Australian plots—the 2000 al-Qa`ida/JI plot, the 2003 LeT-guided plot and the two 2005 Pendennis cells—each involved one or more people who had belonged to the first cluster of travelers who had attended either an al-Qa`ida training camp in Afghanistan or an LeT camp in Pakistan. In addition, the LeT and Pendennis cells contained people closely linked, often through friends or family, with people associated with previous plots.[9] The Holsworthy Barracks case

demonstrates a similar dynamic. While there is no Afghanistan or Pakistan connection, there is a direct link to an established jihadist organization in a conflict zone and evidence of friendship links to an earlier, failed cell.

It was also not the first time a terrorist plot in Australia emerged from a support network for an overseas movement. This had also occurred with the country's first global jihadist plot, which involved Jack Roche, a member of the Australian branch of JI. In 2000, he traveled to Afghanistan to fight with the Taliban, and was asked by senior al-Qa`ida leaders to conduct reconnaissance for attacks to take place during the Sydney Olympics.[10] While for Roche the shift toward focusing on a local target was instigated by senior al-Qa`ida figures who were redirecting training camp attendees, for the Holsworthy Barracks plotters the shift occurred through a different process.

From Support Network to Terrorist Cell

The Holsworthy Barracks plot was not instigated or directed by al-Shabab. In addition, none of the three convicted terrorists received training at an overseas jihadist camp. They dispatched at least two other individuals to Somalia, but one of those could not handle the training, returned early, and was not proven to be part of the conspiracy.[11] The other was last reported to be missing in Somalia.[12]

The shift also did not occur through online radicalization. Evidence presented at the trial showed that their discussions with al-Shabab-affiliated clerics were not online but over the phone, or through people sent to Somalia. The planned attack was a low-tech operation, and downloaded extremist material did not feature in the trial.[13] Possession of online extremist material alone, however, would not have sufficiently explained the plot, as recent research suggests the internet's role has been overstated in discussions of jihadism. One large-scale research project by the UK think-tank

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4 Andrew Zammit, "Who Becomes a Jihadist in Australia? A Comparative Analysis," ARC Linkage Project on Radicalisation - Conference 2010, Monash University, 2011.

5 Cameron Stewart, "Phone Call Sparked Operation Neath," *The Australian*, August 4, 2009.

6 For Saney Aweys' role as facilitator for al-Shabab, see Stewart and *R v. Fattal & Ors*, VSC 681, 2011.

7 *R v. Fattal & Ors*, VSC 681, 2011. Aweys did not explicitly name Fattal and el-Sayed in the released intercepts, but it can be presumed that he was speaking about them. For example, the sentencing document quoted an intercept from June 12, 2009, where Aweys stated to Shaykh Hayakallah: "these are men from the Middle East. They are youth...What can I say...There are about five to six men now. Men who are their friends are in prison who we too knew each other earlier, but who were very close to them and their kinship have been imprisoned. They are imprisoned in this country. So, there are issues about these men having an intention to conduct operations here. We then disagreed between ourselves. We said – what if this endangers of all Muslims in this country/city/town...There are men, you, there are men and I don't know if you have heard it before. Who are numbering up to 10 had been imprisoned here. These people, you know these infidels, they accuse them of something. Anyhow, the men were convicted and they are sentenced between 10 to 15 years of imprisonment. They were very good youth who were humble/poor and they were falsely framed for something that does not exist. These men are the ones that remain behind and we were nonetheless associates of them. But, we known them informally in general sense, and they are good people whom we are brothers. So, one of them came up with this story – to do something, here..." Also see footnote 19.

8 These links to a previous plot demonstrate what Leah Farrall has termed "edge of network connections." See Leah Farrall, "'Edge of Network Connections' and Terrorism," All Things Counter Terrorism, September 29, 2009.

9 Shandon Harris-Hogan, "Australian Neo-Jihadist Terrorism: Mapping the Network and Cell Analysis Using Wiretap Evidence," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 35:4 (2012).

10 Sally Neighbour, *In the Shadow of the Swords: On the Trail of Terrorism to Afghanistan and Australia* (Sydney: Harper Collins Publisher, 2004), pp. 181-196.

11 Munro.

12 Pantucci.

13 *R v. Fattal & Ors*, VSC 681, 2011.

Demos, which interviewed terrorists and compared them with non-violent control groups, found that members of the control groups had also often viewed online extremist material. The difference was that the violent extremists were more likely to have shared the material with each other and discussed it as a group, showing the importance of social dynamics.[14] This can be combined with other research to show that if the group in question has access to training camps and conflict zones or knows people involved in other cells, they are far more likely to turn to violence than the many people who view

> "The Holsworthy Barracks plot shows how a terrorist cell can emerge from what was originally a diaspora-based support network for an overseas insurgency."

online extremist material in isolation. For example, a recent UK Home Office report found that "the internet does not appear to play a significant role" in jihadist radicalization compared to "personal attachments to radicalizing agents."[15] Recent testimony to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Jihadist Use of Social Media by Will McCants and Brian Jenkins supports this.[16] None dispute that the internet plays a role, but other factors are often needed for people to turn from online activity to terrorist plots.

In this case, one such factor was the imprisonment of their friends in the cell, led by the self-proclaimed Shaykh Abdul Nacer Benbrika, who was arrested in Operation Pendennis in 2005. Nayef el-Sayed visited Benbrika in jail in June 2009 and the court heard the plotters were partly motivated by revenge for Benbrika's imprisonment.[17] In a phone conversation between Saney Aweys and Shaykh Hayakallah in Somalia on June 12, 2009, Aweys cited the imprisonment of Benbrika's cell, along with other issues such as troop deployments to Afghanistan, as proof Australia was a legitimate target.[18]

The plotters, however, did not initially intend to attack within Australia. Several first tried to join the jihad in Somalia, but had their passports confiscated by agencies monitoring the plot.[19] The Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO) has the power to confiscate passports to prevent suspected terrorists traveling overseas. This power has been used more than 50 times since 9/11 and prevented several members of the Neath and Pendennis cells from accessing overseas camps.[20] It carries the risk, however, that extremists will then focus their attention at home and, being now aware of state attention, escalate their plans.[21]

Attacking the country in which one resides is not the immediate logical step after failing to join an insurgency abroad, but al-Shabab was not solely nationally focused and was making repeated overtures to, and emphasizing ideological affinity with, al-Qa`ida.[22] This resulted in an official merger between the two organizations in February 2012. The process was only partly underway while the Holsworthy Barracks plot was progressing, yet the Somali jihadist movement's increasingly globally-focused discourse likely made an attack in Australia less of a leap. This is supported by apparent al-Shabab connections appearing in other plots, such as when a man linked to al-Shabab's international network attacked Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard with an axe in January 2010.[23] Support networks for insurgencies with a stricter national focus do not tend to spawn cells that threaten the host country.

The fact that the Holsworthy plotters took al-Shabab's words seriously is evident in how they did not immediately set about attacking the barracks but reached out to al-Shabab-affiliated imams for permission. This was not unusual; jihadist doctrine tends to discourage individual initiative and emphasizes training, combat experience, gaining approval for attacks, and functioning as a group.[24] There are exceptions, such as jihadist strategist Abu Mus`ab al-Suri—highly popular with the Pendennis cells—who theorized a decentralized jihad where Islamists could attack at their own initiative.[25] Al-Qa`ida's senior leadership, on the other hand, tends to seek greater control, but al-Suri's ideas have slowly taken greater hold within the broader movement.[26]

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14 Jamie Bartlett and Carl Miller, "The Edge of Violence: Towards Telling the Difference Between Violent and Non-Violent Radicalization," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24:1 (2011).

15 Noemie Bouhana and Per-Olof H. Wikstrom, "Al Qa'ida-Influenced Radicalisation: A Rapid Evidence Assessment Guided by Situational Action Theory," UK Home Office Occasional Paper 97, November 2011.

16 "Jihadist Use of Social Media - How to Prevent Terrorism and Preserve Innovation," Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, U.S. House of Representatives, December 6, 2011.

17 Debra Jopson, "Australia Raising its own Jihadists," *Sydney Morning Herald*, February 4, 2012; Cameron Stewart, "Three Jailed for Army Base Terror Plot," *Australian*, December 16, 2011.

18 See footnote 7.

19 *R v. Fattal & Ors,* VSC 681, 2011. In the intercepted conversation, Saney Aweys said to Somali Shaykh Abdirahman on July 10, 2009: "the guys are men who came from the Middle East and areas of that proximity...Hence, they want to know if they are about six guys who were among our colleagues. They want to know if it could be carried out here operations or if, for example, something can be robbed/taken from this government. Because they are saying that they are engaged with us in a war. Is it permissible for us to, like, to rob the system, do you understand...Because, most of them cannot leave as their passports were confiscated, and are followed by entities of the State/Government...Therefore, they are saying if we are stranded/stuck here, what is then permissible for us to do for Allah's sake. That's what they would like to know."

20 Gemma Jones, "Passports Revoked in Terror Tourism Crackdown," *Daily Telegraph*, October 17, 2011.

21 Farrall, "What the al Shabab-al Qaeda Merger Means for Australia."

22 Leah Farrall, "Will Al-Qa`ida and Al-Shabab Formally Merge?" *CTC Sentinel* 4:73 (2011).

23 Raffaello Pantucci, "Al-Shabaab Proscribed in Canada and the United Kingdom," *Terrorism Monitor* 8:11 (2010).

24 Brynjar Lia, "Doctrines for Jihadi Terrorist Training," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20:4 (2008); Petter Nesser, "Individual Jihadist Operations in Europe: Patterns and Challenges," *CTC Sentinel* 5:1 (2012).

25 For al-Suri's influence on the Pendennis cells see *Benbrika & Ors v. The Queen*, VSCA 281, 2010; *R v. Benbrika & Ors,* VSC 76, 2011.

26 Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Kyle Dabruzzi, "Is Al-Qaeda's Central Leadership Still Relevant?" *Middle East Quarterly* 15:2 (2008).

It is possible that if the Holsworthy Barracks plotters accessed more extremist material online, or if any had trained in an overseas jihadist camp, they may have made less effort to seek permission. For example, the jihadists arrested in Operation Pendennis did not seek external sanction for an attack, probably because of features the Holsworthy Barracks plot lacked. The Pendennis plotters had a self-taught religious leader providing a theological basis for violence in Australia, they possessed vast amounts of downloaded extremist material, and multiple members had trained in al-Qa`ida or LeT facilities. The Holsworthy Barracks plotters lacked all this, inducing them to seek endorsement from al-Shabab, the only apparent jihadist organization to which the group was linked.

There is no indication that they gained the permission for which they were seeking. The al-Shabab affiliated imams in Somalia were reluctant to endorse the attack and were concerned about a backlash affecting local al-Shabab support.[27] The plotters themselves disagreed over whether they had received permission.[28] Whether they would have kept seeking *fatawa* until they received one, would have acted on their own, or would have given up is unclear. As the judge noted when sentencing them, planning and preparing for the massacre was itself a crime; going through with it would have been a further crime.[29]

Conclusion
The Holsworthy Barracks plot shows how a terrorist cell can emerge from what was originally a diaspora-based support network for an overseas insurgency. In this case, the transformation occurred through the involvement of non-diaspora based ideological sympathizers, socially linked to a failed earlier terrorist cell, determined to seek revenge, and restricted from traveling for jihad abroad.

The fact that the internet played little role in this process supports wider research that has recently challenged the emphasis on online radicalization. Roshonara Choudhry-type incidents (where an individual is self-radicalized online) do happen, but so far the internet has proven less important for radicalization in Australia than real world social networks that include people with experience in camps and conflict zones.[30] Online extremist material might increase willingness to act, but these other factors are usually required.

Al-Shabab itself also played little direct role in the cell's transformation: its globally focused discourse and alignment with al-Qa`ida may have helped enable it, but the Somali jihadist movement did not instigate the plot and key figures advised against it to avoid losing support. This supports other findings that al-Shabab is not known to have directed any attacks in the West. Despite its endorsement of al-Qa`ida's global jihad, they have instead focused on local and regional politics, although this certainly has the potential to change with the recent al-Qa`ida merger.[31]

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European Experiences in Counterradicalization

By James Brandon and Lorenzo Vidino

IN MARCH 2012, Mohammed Merah, a self-identified jihadist, killed three French servicemen and four French Jews during a series of gun attacks in Toulouse before himself dying in a shoot-out with French police. Although Merah's attacks were less sophisticated than previous attacks in Europe such as the 2004 Madrid bombings or the 2005 London bombings, his actions underscore that jihadist terrorism remains a viable threat in Europe and a substantial concern for European security services.

The attack is also a reminder of why several major European countries have adopted national counterradicalization strategies in recent years, which are aimed at deradicalizing or "disengaging" existing radicals or at preventing individuals from adopting radical or pro-violent ideologies in the first place. Many of these countries—such as the United Kingdom and the Netherlands—credit these programs with contributing to the reduction of the domestic terrorist threat from homegrown jihadists.

This article reviews European counterradicalization efforts, providing clarity on the different programs and strategies employed in the region.[1]

European Counterradicalization Work
From approximately 2001, virtually all European countries boosted their traditional counterterrorism capabilities. They passed antiterrorism legislation, increased intelligence agencies' manpower and capabilities, and improved transnational cooperation. In addition, several European countries—notably the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway—progressively introduced counterradicalization strategies to deradicalize or disengage existing militants and to prevent the radicalization of new ones. The aim of

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27 Farrall, "What the al Shabab-al Qaeda Merger Means for Australia."

28 Stuart Rintoul, "Accused Split Over All-Clear for Attack," *Australian*, September 16, 2010.

29 *R v. Fattal & Ors*, VSC 681, 2011.

30 Vikram Dodd, "Profile: Roshanara Choudhry," *Guardian*, November 2, 2010.

31 Clint Watts, "Al Qaeda & al Shabaab Merger: Why Now?" Selected Wisdom, February 18, 2012.

1 This article is based on the findings of a report that will be published shortly through the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence. The report was based on extensive fieldwork in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway.

these strategies, in essence, is to try to prevent terrorism not only by catching terrorists, but also by preventing their emergence in the first place. Importantly, many of these programs were developed or escalated as countries realized, often in the aftermath of terrorist attacks, that traditional counterterrorism policing work alone was not enough.

The pioneer in the field has been the United Kingdom, which in 2003 launched a tentative domestic counterradicalization strategy called "Prevent" as part of its broader "Contest" counterterrorism strategy to tackle domestic jihadist terrorism.[2] Despite its many revisions and the widespread criticism it has attracted, particularly after it was hurriedly scaled up following the 2005 London attacks, Prevent has inspired many European imitators. After the 2004 assassination of filmmaker Theo van Gogh in the Netherlands, various Dutch municipalities devised their own counterradicalization strategies. In 2007, amid continuing threats from radicals, the Dutch government rolled out its "Polarization and Radicalization Action Plan," a national strategy that distilled the experience of these municipalities with the aim of extending them throughout the country.[3] In 2009, Danish authorities released their own national strategy, partly in response to the continuing fall-out of the Prophet Muhammad cartoon crisis.[4] Norway did the same in 2010 and is expected to expand its program further to prevent a repeat of far-right militant Anders Breivik's 2011 attack.[5] Other European countries, such as Sweden and Germany, have devised less comprehensive programs, often simply at the local level.

European counterradicalization programs differ greatly from one another in terms of aims, structure, budget, and underlying philosophy. Each one is also deeply shaped by political, cultural, and legal elements unique to that country. Nevertheless, the experience to date points to certain key characteristics and challenges common to all European counterradicalization programs.

Different Types of Programs
European counterradicalization programs can be broadly divided into two categories: general preventive initiatives and targeted interventions.

The former aim to make broad at-risk societal groups less susceptible to terrorist recruitment efforts. This is usually done through attempts to discredit dangerous radical groups and ideologies, promote democratic participation and address negative perceptions of mainstream society, democracy and national governments within these groups. In the United Kingdom, for instance, such policies aiming to counter pro-al-Qa`ida radicalization have led to the funding of moderate Islamic preachers and groups in the hope they will popularize alternative, non-violent, democratic and secular understandings of Islam as a counterweight to pro-violent ideologies, as well as to non-religious groups aiming to promote "social cohesion," integration and improved interfaith relations.[6] Some such groups worked at a national level, while others had a more local remit; similarly, some were aimed at particular ethnic groups, such as Somalis or Pakistanis, while others had a less explicitly ethnic or religious focus.

Supplementing such broad societal initiatives are interventions targeted at specific individuals who already subscribe to pro-terrorist narratives or ideologies, or who are believed to be at risk of adopting such views. The aim of such interventions is to disrupt these individuals' progress toward violence, ideally through realigning their views with those of the mainstream population as well as through breaking their social links with radicals. These initiatives vary significantly in characteristics and underlying philosophy, some focusing on the reinforcement of democratic values, others on the use of moderate Islamic theology to displace radical Islamist ideas or through fostering individual self-empowerment or addressing socioeconomic factors. In some instances, as in the Netherlands, such interventions have been conducted with convicted radicals. In other cases, as in Norway or the United Kingdom, they are conducted by local police or council workers with predominantly young mostly school-age individuals who have not yet been convicted of any crime, but who are believed to be at high-risk of future radicalization.[7]

Current Trends
Despite the significant differences in the size, characteristics and underlying philosophies of these various European counterradicalization strategies, it is possible to observe some emerging common trends. One involves the programs' aims. Despite variations from country to country, European authorities are increasingly reducing the focus of their counterradicalization efforts to violent radicalization toward terrorism rather than seeking to confront broader extremism through a counterterrorism prism. This is not because authorities do not see a relation between non-violent extremism and violent radicalization, or that they do not wish to tackle the non-security related challenges posed by extremism. In practice, branches of government have often struggled to tackle extremism and terrorism simultaneously (this is particularly a challenge for intelligence officials schooled in seeing preventing terrorism as their sole role), while many programs have struggled to overcome charges that "countering extremism" amounts to policing citizens' non-violent thoughts.

2 "Project CONTEST: The Government's Counterterrorism Strategy," UK House of Commons, 2009.

3 "Polarisation and Radicalisation Action Plan 2007-2011," Netherlands Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2006.

4 "A Common and Safe Future," Government of Denmark, January 2009.

5 Personal interviews, Norwegian officials from Ministry of Justice and the Police, Oslo, Norway, November 2011.

6 An example is the British government's funding of The Radical Middle Way, an initiative aimed at having mainstream Muslim scholars tour the country and challenge al-Qa`ida's ideology in lectures before young people.

7 In the United Kingdom, these initiatives are part of the Channel Program, while in Norway the police engage in what it calls "empowerment conversations." While these two interventions are police-led, in the Netherlands and Denmark they are, for the most part, crafted and implemented by civil servants in individual municipalities. For further information on the United Kingdom's principal interventions program, see "Channel: Supporting Individuals Vulnerable to Recruitment by Violent Extremists - A Guide for Local Partnerships," UK Home Office, March 2010. Information on Norway's principal interventions program, the police-led "Empowerment Conversations," is based on personal interviews with Police Superintendent Bjørn Øvrum, crime preventive coordinator, Oslo Police District, Norway, November 2011.

A second trend is that while counterradicalization work is moving away from challenging extremism, European authorities are highly positive about their targeted interventions against individuals believed to be at risk of adopting pro-terrorist ideologies. Sir Norman Bettison, who as Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) lead for Prevent policing is the UK police's *de facto* overseer of national Prevent work, stated in late 2010: "Thus far not one of the 1,500 people that have been intervened with have been arrested for any terrorist-related offense."[8] Danish, Dutch and Norwegian authorities have intervened on a significantly smaller number of individuals but claim similarly high levels of success.[9] Carefully planned one-on-one interventions targeting well identified individuals who clearly espouse radical views or, even further, are involved in radical networks, are increasingly seen as a sensitive tool authorities can use in their counterterrorism efforts. This is a striking contrast with the United States, where individuals believed to be potentially at risk of radicalization may instead be viewed by police as potential targets for "agent provocateur" schemes.

Fine Tuning European Strategies
Several additional trends and commonalities can be observed in how European countries have fine-tuned their counterradicalization efforts.

Mainstreaming and Normalizing Counterradicalization
A clear trend across all countries is to integrate counterradicalization work, and even relatively complex intervention work, into the ordinary day-to-day responsibilities of police officers, teachers, housing officers and medical staff. One important result of this is to increase the likelihood of radicals and potential radicals being identified at an early stage. Often a prerequisite for this is the training of key government frontline workers (ranging from police officers and teachers working with high-risk communities to prison officers

and key civil servants), something that was not always appreciated when such programs were first introduced.

Importance of Good Communication
Many European counterradicalization strategies have been met with severe criticisms from civil rights groups, opposition parties and from within both the civil service and Muslim communities, for various reasons. This has often severely reduced these programs' effectiveness. In response, European authorities have had to learn to put intense emphasis on better communicating their strategy and aims to the public; for instance, by portraying police-led counterradicalization work as "supporting vulnerable people."[10]

Emphasis on Assessment
Most European programs now contain built-in measures to gauge the effectiveness of different projects. This helps ensure value-for-money for taxpayers and enables assessment of which programs should be kept, which need to be refined and which should be scrapped.

Finally, from the specific perspective of working with Muslim communities, three trends can be observed.

1. Shift Away from "Theological" Approach
Having initially experimented with funding Muslim groups to conduct broad counterradicalization work in their communities and with Islamic theological interventions with individuals, most counterradicalization work and interventions have now shifted toward broader secular approaches that are generally aimed at addressing background vulnerabilities and encouraging involvement in the democratic process. Nonetheless, some specific deradicalization interventions with individuals may still use theological approaches in certain circumstances.

2. Exclusion of Islamists and Salafists
In keeping with this ethos, there is now a broad European consensus against funding, empowering or employing Islamists or Salafists in the counterradicalization context. Nevertheless, most programs are willing to conduct non-empowering engagement

with Islamists and Salafists in the belief that occasional, case-by-case, tactical cooperation with these groups can yield some positive results.

3. Dual Focus on Far-Right and Islamist Extremism
Most European counterradicalization programs now target both jihadist terrorism and other forms of terrorism, including—according to each national context—from the far-right, the far-left, and animals' rights activists. While the Breivik attack in Norway showed the clear need for such work, an additional benefit is that counterradicalization work against a wide range of terrorism undermines claims that such work is exclusively targeting Muslims or Islam.

Conclusion
Although such initiatives are notoriously difficult to assess, European governments claim extensive successes for their counterradicalization programs and credit them with some of the reduction of jihadist activity in Europe from its circa 2002-2006 peak. Counterradicalization work remains an imprecise science and hardly a silver bullet. At the same time, however, while all European authorities continue to recognize that solid police investigative work, backed by input from each country's internal and external intelligence services, is still the central prerequisite for preventing terrorism, increasing numbers also now see counterradicalization as an essential supportive tool that can significantly reduce the likelihood of a terrorist attack.

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8 Sir Norman Bettison, "Oral Evidence Taken Before the Home Affairs Committee on the 'Roots Of Violent Radicalisation,'" UK House of Commons, November 1, 2011.

9 Personal interviews, Danish, Dutch and Norwegian officials, August-November 2011.

10 "Prevent Strategy," UK Home Office, 2011.

The Southern Thailand Insurgency in the Wake of the March 2012 Bombings

By Zachary Abuza

ON MARCH 31, 2012, a series of coordinated bombings rocked the southern Thai cities of Yala and Hat Yai. In Yala, a car bomb and two motorcycle bombs detonated 10 minutes apart on a crowded street, killing 11 and wounding 106. In Hat Yai, a pickup truck loaded with two 33-pound gas tanks packed with ammonium nitrate was parked in the underground garage of the largest hotel in the city, killing three and wounding more than 300. These attacks were the worst to strike southern Thailand since 2007 and garnered domestic and international media attention.

Despite these attacks, this article argues that the insurgency in southern Thailand is not entering a new stage. Instead, the March 2012 coordinated bombings should be viewed as a reminder that the slow-burning insurgency has entered its ninth year, claiming the lives of 5,200 people in more than 11,000 incidents of violence.[1] Additionally, the Thai government and military continue to pursue weak policy measures in southern Thailand, the latter of which appears to be more worried about political developments in the capital. These factors ensure that the insurgency in southern Thailand will persist for the foreseeable future.

Background to the Escalation of Violence

Insurgency is not new to southern Thailand and has its roots in the 1909 Anglo-Siamese border agreement. Since then, the majority Muslim Malay inhabitants of Thailand's three southernmost provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat have resisted attempts to be assimilated into Thai culture or have taken up arms. Malay rebels, however, were divided over goals and ideology, and effective Thai counterinsurgency and surging economic growth in the 1980s led to

a collapse of the rebellion by the mid-1990s. Hardliners incubated, and by 2004 had renewed their secessionist rebellion. Unlike previous iterations of the insurgency, the current militants have taken the fight into the cities and towns and regularly engage in mass casualty terrorist attacks. They have succeeded in driving large numbers of Buddhist Thais out of the region and turning large swaths of territory into ungoverned space.

Violence began in 2004 and grew steadily as the Thai government implemented a series of failed counterinsurgency policies, while being in denial about the insurgents' goals. Violence peaked in mid-2007, when the Thai army surged the region with some 60,000 troops. Yet since the end of 2008, violent incidents rose steadily and then plateaued. Since January 2009, more than 1,230 people have been killed and 2,730 wounded.[2] This includes: 102 soldiers killed and 520 wounded; 57 police killed and 260 wounded; 195 rangers or defense volunteers killed and 267 wounded; 112 village headmen or their deputies killed and 79 wounded; 762 civilians killed and 1,576 wounded; 31 teachers killed and 18 wounded; and four monks killed and eight wounded.[3]

Additionally, since the start of 2009 there have been more than 496 successful bombings, not including 63 failed or defused improvised explosive devices (IED), and some 96 separate grenade attacks.[4] Insurgents use grenades as often as they capture them from security forces. In the past five years, there have only been more IED attacks on an annual basis in two countries: Afghanistan and Iraq. Most

IED attacks reported in the media are in the 11-pound range, although 44-pound IEDs are routinely employed. While car and motorcycle bombs garner headlines, most IEDs are command-detonated bombs buried beneath or beside the road in rural areas to target soldiers on teacher escort duties. Disturbingly,

> **"Throughout 2011 militants increased their use of time-delayed secondary bombs to target security forces and first responders."**

throughout 2011 militants increased their use of time-delayed secondary bombs to target security forces and first responders. In June 2011, for example, four of the eleven IEDs were time-delayed. In May 2012, two of the defused bombs were time-delayed, intended for first responders.

During the past three years, insurgents have gained greater confidence in engaging in sophisticated attacks on hard military targets. Since January 2009, there have been 46 raids, an average of just over one per month. Not only have these attacks been successful in terms of killing security forces and capturing weapons, they have exposed real weaknesses and incompetence within the Royal Thai Army (RTA). For example, in January 2011 insurgents attacked a remote army base, killing four soldiers, including their commander, and wounding 13 others.[5] They made off with at least 20 small arms and assault rifles.[6] In March 2012, an estimated 50 militants attacked a remote military outpost in Narathiwat's Bacho district with M79 grenades and assault weapons, wounding 12 soldiers.[7] The firefight lasted 20 minutes before the militants retreated. The same day, militants overtook a Ranger outpost, executing two Rangers and making off with seven weapons.

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1 According to the Southern Border Province Administration, between January 2004 and December 2011 there were 5,243 fatalities and nearly 9,000 people were wounded or otherwise injured in 12,604 insurgent attacks. See "South's Seemingly Lost Cause," *Bangkok Post*, January 8, 2012.

2 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.

3 Ibid.

4 This data comes from a database that the author maintains derived from open source media reporting. As such, it is conservative and lower than official tallies.

5 "Rebels Attack Army Camp, Kill Soldiers," *Bangkok Post*, January 20, 2011.

6 Ibid.

7 "Two Army Outposts Attacked in the South," *Bangkok Post*, March 9, 2010.

Bold attacks on hardened military outposts are not a daily occurrence, as militants tend to be conservative and avoid unnecessary risks. Nevertheless, they still engage in three to four prolonged firefights a month with security forces. They have demonstrated that they are capable of planning and executing fairly sophisticated attacks against hardened Thai military targets.

Government Failures to Quell the Insurgency
The violence has little to do with who is in power in Bangkok despite each successive government's pledge that they will end the conflict. Although the current incarnation of the insurgency began under Thaksin Shinawatra's rule, violence soared following the September 2006 coup, peaking in mid-2007. The RTA initiated their own "surge," and violence dropped measurably in 2008. Yet following the Democrat Party's assumption of power in December 2008—a party whose electoral base encompasses the deep south—violence climbed in 2009, and has remained stubbornly persistent since. The mid-2011 electoral victory of Thaksin's younger sister Yingluck Shinawatra—who won a landslide everywhere but the deep south—has had no impact on the rate of violence. The southern insurgency did not play a role in the election, which was dominated by elite politics in Bangkok and the issue of national reconciliation, including the return of ousted former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. In short, since the coup, no government has either wanted to hold the military accountable for the south or put in place policies to which the military strongly objects. The easiest decision is to let the military continue with its current measures, which have failed to stem the violence. No government has been willing to tackle the issue of security force impunity and seriously investigate allegations of torture and extrajudicial killings. Successive regimes have been unwilling to push through legislation that would give the southern region more political and cultural identity.

There are some 60,000 security forces deployed in the south, yet RTA budget priorities are focused more on prestige items, which they struggle to maintain or deploy, such as the HTMS Chakri Naruebet, the region's only aircraft carrier, which last put out to sea for a

High Availability Disaster Recovery (HADR) operation in November 2010, or a new squadron of Gripen fighter jets. Despite a surge in military expenditures since the September 2006 coup, little has gone to the security forces in the deep south.[8] Yet the south continues to drain resources from the various Thai governments, which have spent roughly TBT160 billion ($5.05 billion) in counterinsurgency operations and development projects in the far south since violence erupted in January 2004.[9]

The security forces remain riddled with rivalry, especially between the police and army. Although the inter-agency Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC), which played a large role in quelling the insurgency in the 1980s-1990s, was reestablished in 2007—after former

> **"The insurgency is horizontal, comprised of disparate groups without a clear leadership structure. More importantly, the militants have little incentive to negotiate."**

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra dismantled it in 2002—it has less authority than it did in the past. Reforms in late 2011 to make the SBPAC report directly to the prime minister's office have done little to alter developments. The RTA's Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) remains the lead agency and coordinating mechanism, autonomous from political control. While the SBPAC is supposed to be in charge of development planning, the army's ISOC still controls most development funds.[10] The senior RTA leadership appears convinced that the insurgency is driven by smuggling operations, not

secessionism or political grievances. For example, three days after the deadly car bombings in Yala and Hat Yai in March 2012, RTA commander General Prayuth Chan-ocha explained, "It's not just about separatism, there is a new kind of threat from drug dealers and contraband traders."[11]

The government has persistently failed to ameliorate the violence. Countless initiatives have been promised to the southerners but little has actually been implemented. Plans to make Malayu the working language have never been operationalized. The government has spent some Bt63 billion ($1.98 billion) on development projects in the south, but some in the south complain that increased funding has exacerbated the problem. The insurgency has never solely been about poverty or under-development—although southerners do complain about these issues—but identity. Indeed, the Malay-dominated southern provinces are not the poorest in Thailand; that ignoble designation goes to the Issarn region in the country's northeast, not surprisingly the epicenter of the pro-Thaksin "Red Shirt" movement. According to the United Nations Development Program, the southern provinces fair well in most human development indicators, although they clearly lag in education and security.[12] Most of the development assistance has been administered by the RTA's ISOC, which has directed the funds to communities with low levels of violence or trusted loyalists, which only fuels resentment.

The security forces, operating under the 2005 Emergency Decree, have blanket immunity. Not one official or member of the security forces has been convicted of wrongdoing, despite evidence compiled by human rights activists of abuses and extrajudicial killings. There is some evidence that the culture of impunity is starting to recede. In March 2012, an independent commission concluded that a group of paramilitary rangers had mistakenly shot dead four Muslim villagers. In a rare concession, the

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8 For the growth in Thai military expenditures since the coup, see the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's index, available at http://milexdata.sipri.org.
9 "B160bn Spent Fighting Southern Unrest," *Bangkok Post*, May 8, 2012; "South's Seemingly Lost Cause," *Bangkok Post*, January 8, 2012.
10 "SBPAC Given Wide Powers," *Bangkok Post*, January 20, 2011.

11 "Another Weekend Bomb Victim Dies," *Bangkok Post*, April 3, 2012.
12 "2009 Thailand Human Development Report," United Nations Development Program, May 2010. The Human Achievement Index is eight indices based on 40 indicators.

government announced that it would allow the rangers to be indicted and stand trial. The 4th Army commander, Lieutenant General Udomchai Thammasarorat, pledged, "If the court finds them guilty and sentence them to imprisonment, we will accept the court decision."[13] Although this is a step in the right direction, those charged are still rangers, not regular soldiers, which is an important distinction.

The legal front has perpetuated the violence. Under the Emergency Decree, suspected militants can be held for 28 days without charge. Due to the incompetence of the police or simply their inability to garner evidence, more than 90% of the suspects are released. Of those that stood trial, by mid 2011 the acquittal rate was 43%.[14] The numbers for 2011 were even worse. For example, in December 2011 a Thai court dismissed charges against 72 of 100 insurgent suspects who stood trial in 2011 due to insufficient evidence.[15] On April 30, 2012, five suspected members of the Barisan Revolusi Nasional, the insurgent group most responsible for violence, were acquitted of murder and separatist activities. In part, the court dismissed the case because of mistreatment of the suspects while in detention.[16] The high rate of acquittals has infuriated the army, which both lessened their already questionable willingness to work with the police and possibly encouraged extrajudicial killings, fueling local anger over security forces' impunity.[17]

While the Yingluck government has recently come under assault for allegedly holding talks with the rebels, all governments since 2004 have held back-channel talks.[18] To date, however, the rebel representatives have failed to prove that they have command and control over the militants. Many of the outspoken "representatives" include old members of the Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO), which, by their own admission, are not engaging in the violence.[19] The insurgency is horizontal, comprised of disparate groups without a clear leadership structure. More importantly, the militants have little incentive to negotiate. They are not losing, but instead are accomplishing their short-term objectives: making the region ungovernable, eliminating moderate Muslims and political rivals, sowing distrust between the people and the state, forcing people into parallel Muslim social service providers and schools, convincing people that the state is unable to protect them, and driving Buddhists from the region. The Thai government has offered little in the negotiations. The government is just now implementing Malayu language instruction in schools, some five years after it promised to do so. More importantly, any meaningful autonomy plan that might appeal to the insurgents is off the table for as long as the Thai king is alive and the military holds significant political sway. The military has expressed its steadfast objection to any proposed autonomy.[20] No change to the unitary Thai state is possible during the reign of the current monarch.

There have been other small measures, most of which have centered on reorganizing the chain of command and improving inter-agency cooperation. In May 2012, the government implemented a program to pay compensation to the victims of the violence—both victims of militants and Thai security forces. Overall, however, the Yingluck Shinawatra government has done little to challenge the RTA's handling of the south, or implement any other new bold policies.

Conclusion

It is unlikely that the militants will stage any large-scale attacks as they did on March 31 in the near future. Although they disabused the government's assertion that the insurgency was under control, such attacks do put pressure on the security sector to respond. Ten suspects were arrested—although two were later released for lack of evidence— and a cache of materials and weapons was recovered.[21] Losses at that rate are unsustainable for a small movement,[22] especially when low-level attacks are so effective in achieving their short-term goals. Violence in April and May did decline, back to the statistical norm.

As far as the RTA is concerned, that level of violence is probably acceptable, as it is more concerned about elite machinations in Bangkok, surrounding the possible amnesty and return of Thaksin Shinawatra, as well as preparations for the royal succession and the subsequent political fallout. The insurgency in the south remains a low-burn side conflict, but one that allows the RTA to justify a larger expenditure and to ensure that there is no challenge to the unitary Thai state.

As for the United States, the National Counterterrorism Center just released an annual report listing Thailand as the seventh most terrorist-prone country.[23] Yet the U.S. government has downplayed the violence, which has not targeted Westerners or moved out of the deep south. Instead, Washington is focused on rebuilding its alliance with Thailand, engaging in the annual Cobra Gold multilateral exercises, and gaining a permanent HADR facility at the U-Tapao military base.

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13 "Army Rangers Kill Four Pattani Villagers: Region 4 Commander," MCOT, March 21, 2012; "Rangers At Fault in Fatal Shooting," *Bangkok Post*, March 21, 2012.

14 Personal interview, team from the Muslim Lawyers Association, Bangkok, Thailand, July 10, 2010; "Seven Years Afterward—An Achievement or a Failure?" Isara News Service, January 3, 2011.

15 "Court Drops 72 Insurgency Cases in 1 Year," *Bangkok Post*, December 24, 2011.

16 "Five Acquitted in Southern Murder Trial," *The Nation*, April 30, 2012.

17 Personal interview, team from the Muslim Lawyers Association, Bangkok, Thailand, July 10, 2010. For more on the issue of extrajudicial killings, see "They Took Nothing But His Life: Unlawful Killings in Thailand's Southern Insurgency," Amnesty International, 2011.

18 "SBPAC Denies Talks with Rebels," *Bangkok Post*, April 4, 2012.

19 Anthony Davis, "Interview: Kasturi Mahkota, Foreign Affairs Spokesman, Patani United Liberation Organisation (PULO)," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, August 8, 2006.

20 "Govt Quietly Studies South," *Bangkok Post*, March 8, 2012.

21 "Police Arrest 7 Bomb Suspects," *Bangkok Post*, April 5, 2012.

22 The RTA believes that there are 4,000-5,000 insurgents and 300 people in leadership positions. See "Prayuth Calls for Inclusive Peace Talks," *Bangkok Post*, April 3, 2012.

23 "2011 Report on Terrorism," U.S. National Counterterrorism Center, June 2012.

Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

May 1, 2012 (UNITED STATES): A U.S. federal jury found Adis Medunjanin, a Bosnian-born U.S. citizen, guilty of plotting a coordinated suicide bombing attack on New York City subways in 2009 at the behest of al-Qa`ida leaders. Medunjanin's co-conspirators, Najibullah Zazi and Zarein Ahmedzay, pleaded guilty to the charges in 2010 and testified against Medunjanin. Sentencing was scheduled for September 7. – *Reuters, May 1; USA Today, May 1*

May 1, 2012 (SOMALIA): A suicide bomber killed three Somali lawmakers at a hotel in Dusamareb. Al-Shabab claimed responsibility. – *Reuters, May 1*

May 1, 2012 (SOMALIA): A car bomb exploded in Mogadishu, killing two people. Al-Shabab claimed responsibility. – *Reuters, May 1*

May 1, 2012 (NIGERIA): The Boko Haram group released a video celebrating its recent bombing of a Nigerian newspaper office, and it warned that it would target local and foreign media in the future if they published reports that were biased against Boko Haram or Islam. – *Reuters, May 2*

May 2, 2012 (GLOBAL): Two new issues of *Inspire* magazine, which is published by al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula, surfaced on Islamist web forums. They were the first new issues of the magazine to appear since the deaths of Anwar al-`Awlaqi and Samir Khan in September 2011. One of the articles read, "To the disappointment of our enemies, issue 9 of *Inspire* magazine is out against all odds…The Zionists and the Crusaders thought that the magazine was gone with the martyrdom of Shaykh Anwar and brother Samir. Yet again, they have failed to come to terms with the fact that the Muslim ummah is the most fertile and most generous mother that gives birth to thousands and thousands of the likes of Shaykh Anwar and brother Samir." Another article quoted Anwar al-`Awlaqi saying, "The use of poisons or chemical and biological weapons against population centers is allowed and is strongly recommended due to its great effect on the enemy." – *ABC News, May 2; ABC News, May 3*

May 2, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): The Taliban announced that it will officially start its annual spring offensive on May 3. The Taliban is calling the offensive al-Farouk. – *USA Today, May 2*

May 2, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber attacked the Green Village residential compound in Kabul, killing at least seven people. – *BBC, May 2; New York Times, May 2*

May 3, 2012 (GLOBAL): The Combating Terrorism Center at the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, released 17 declassified documents found in Usama bin Ladin's Abbottabad, Pakistan, compound. The documents provided insight into al-Qa`ida as well as Bin Ladin's views on the evolution of the terrorist group he founded. – *CNN, May 4*

May 3, 2012 (RUSSIA): A double bombing at a police station killed at least 13 people in Makhachkala, Dagestan, located in Russia's troubled North Caucasus region. A suicide bomber was responsible for at least one of the explosions. – *New York Times, May 4*

May 4, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber killed at least 20 people in an attack targeting a police checkpoint near a crowded market in Bajaur Agency in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan claimed responsibility. – *Reuters, May 4*

May 4, 2012 (NIGERIA): Suspected Boko Haram gunmen stormed a prison in Borno State, killing two guards and freeing an unknown number of prisoners. – *Voice of America, May 4*

May 6, 2012 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida released a video of American hostage Warren Weinstein, who was kidnapped in Lahore, Pakistan, in August 2011. In the video, Weinstein said he will be killed unless President Barack Obama agreed to al-Qa`ida's demands. – *CNN, May 7*

May 6, 2012 (YEMEN): A U.S. drone killed top al-Qa`ida operative Fahd al-Quso in Shabwa Province in Yemen. Al-Quso was wanted for his role in the 2000 bombing of the USS *Cole* in Yemen's Aden harbor. – *Fox News, May 6*

May 6, 2012 (PAKISTAN): Pakistani Taliban militants beheaded two Pakistan Army soldiers and displayed their heads from wooden poles in Miran Shah, North Waziristan Agency in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *AP, May 7*

May 7, 2012 (UNITED STATES): The Central Intelligence Agency foiled a plot by al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) to destroy a U.S.-bound airliner with a sophisticated bomb containing no metal. The new bomb was designed to fit in a passenger's underwear, similar to AQAP's Christmas Day 2009 failed plot. Various reports, quoting U.S. and Yemeni officials, said that the suicide bomber AQAP recruited to carry out the attack was actually an undercover operative working for U.S. and Saudi intelligence. – *AP, May 8; USA Today, May 9*

May 7, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): According to CNN, up to 20 high level Taliban prisoners have been released from NATO custody in Afghanistan during the past two years in the pursuit of peace negotiations. "In all cases, they [those released] were assessed as unlikely to rejoin the insurgency," said the CNN report. – *CNN, May 7*

May 8, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban fighters attacked a convoy of Afghan education officials in Paktika Province, killing five officials. – *New York Times, May 8*

May 8, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A remotely-detonated bomb killed five Afghan policemen in Farah Province. – *AFP, May 9*

May 10, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Six Taliban gunmen killed three police officers in Paktika Province. The gunmen wore explosive vests under Afghan Local Police uniforms and tried to pass through a security checkpoint near the district governor's building. A gunfight ensued, and two of the assailants detonated their explosive vests. All of the militants were eventually killed. – *New York Times, May 10*

May 10, 2012 (SYRIA): Two suicide car bombers killed at least 55 people in Qazaz district in Damascus. Witnesses said that the bombers appeared to target a Syrian military intelligence building. The al-Nusra Front claimed

responsibility. – *Voice of America, May 10; The Telegraph, May 12*

May 10, 2012 (YEMEN): The Pentagon announced that U.S. troops have been sent to Yemen to help train Yemeni soldiers. According to the *Christian Science Monitor,* "U.S. forces had been on the ground training Yemeni forces last year, but President Obama suspended the mission in the wake of political turmoil in the country." – *Christian Science Monitor, May 11*

May 10, 2012 (YEMEN): Two airstrikes in southern Yemen killed seven al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula militants. Two of the dead were described as top operatives. – *USA Today, May 10*

May 10, 2012 (CHINA): A suicide bomber blew himself up to protest the demolition of his house in southwest China's Yunnan Province. Three people were killed. – *AFP, May 11; BBC, May 11*

May 11, 2012 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new video message encouraging Somali militants to continue fighting despite recent challenges. – *AP, May 12*

May 11, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A man wearing an Afghan Army uniform shot to death a U.S. soldier in Kunar Province. The provincial police chief said that the gunman was an Afghan Army soldier. The Taliban claimed responsibility. – *CBS, May 11; New York Daily News, May 11*

May 11, 2012 (SYRIA): Syrian state television reported that the army foiled an attempted suicide car bombing in Aleppo. The alleged militant was shot to death, and authorities reportedly found 2,640 pounds of explosives in his vehicle. – *AFP, May 11*

May 12, 2012 (YEMEN): Two suspected U.S. drone strikes killed 11 al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula militants in southern Yemen. The first strike killed six militants near the border of Marib and Shabwa provinces. The second strike killed five militants in Marib. – *AP, May 12*

May 12, 2012 (NIGERIA): Suspected Boko Haram gunmen burned down a police station in Borno State. Two policemen were killed. – *AFP, May 14*

May 13, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A gunman in a car assassinated Arsala Rahmani, a top member of the Afghan peace council and a senator in parliament, in Kabul. As described by the Associated Press, "Police said an assassin with a silencer-equipped pistol shot Rahmani, who was in his 70s, as he was riding in his car in one of the capital's most secure areas, near Kabul University." The Taliban publicly denied responsibility. – *AP, May 13*

May 13, 2012 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber targeted a police checkpoint in Baghdad, killing at least three people. – *Reuters, May 13*

May 13, 2012 (IRAQ): A car bomb targeting a passing Iraqi Army patrol exploded in Falluja, Anbar Province, killing two Iraqi soldiers. – *Reuters, May 13*

May 14, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A suspected suicide bomber killed at least seven Afghan civilians in a pharmacy in Faryab Province. Among the dead was a member of a provincial council from neighboring Badghis Province. – *Washington Post, May 14*

May 15, 2012 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in a vehicle targeted an Iraqi Army base in Mosul, Ninawa Province, killing seven Iraqi soldiers. – *CNN, May 15*

May 16, 2012 (SOMALIA): Abu Mansur al-Amriki, who is U.S. citizen Omar Hammami, released an autobiography detailing his experiences in Somalia. Hammami left his home in Alabama to join the al-Shabab militant group in Somalia around 2007. – *AFP, May 17*

May 17, 2012 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new video message, urging people in Saudi Arabia to revolt, following the example of citizens in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia. "The family of Saud might be able to kill tens, hundreds, or thousands from amongst you, but if hundreds of thousands come out, then they will be shocked and will end up, Allah permitting, in the state that their brethren ended up in amongst the ousted tyrants," al-Zawahiri said. – *CNN, May 18*

May 17, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Four gunmen armed with explosives attacked the governor's compound in Farah Province, killing six Afghan policemen and one civilian. All four assailants were killed. The governor was at the compound, but was not injured. – *Fox News, May 17*

May 17, 2012 (YEMEN): Yemeni government forces managed to recapture some territory from al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula in Abyan Province. According to Voice of America, "Yemeni military officials say government troops are moving slowly along the outskirts of the al-Qaida stronghold in Zinjibar, trying to avoid being out-flanked. Zinjibar was captured by the militants in May of last year [2011]." – *Voice of America, May 17*

May 18, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber killed at least 20 people in an attack on a police checkpoint in Bajaur Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *The Windsor Star, May 19*

May 19, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber attacked a police checkpoint in Khost Province, killing six civilians and two policemen. – *Bloomberg, May 19*

May 19, 2012 (SYRIA): A suicide bomber in a vehicle targeted a military compound in Deir al-Zour, killing nine people. – *AP, May 19*

May 21, 2012 (YEMEN): A suicide bomber targeted a military parade rehearsal in Sana`a, killing at least 100 soldiers. The bomber was described as a soldier taking part in the drill. Ansar al-Shari`a, which is tied to al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula, claimed responsibility, and it said that the attack was aimed at Yemen's defense minister and was revenge for the government's campaign against the militants. – *AP, May 21; Guardian, May 21; New York Times, May 22*

May 23, 2012 (UNITED STATES): U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that cyber experts based at the State Department had engaged in a form of cyber war with al-Qa`ida-affiliated extremists. Clinton said that after al-Qa`ida sympathizers bragged about killing Americans, "within 48 hours, our team plastered the same sites with

altered versions of the ads that showed the toll al Qaeda attacks have taken on the Yemeni people." – *AP, May 23*

May 23, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A U.S. drone killed at least four suspected militants in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *BBC, May 23*

May 24, 2012 (UNITED STATES): Barry Walter Bujol, Jr., who was convicted in the United States of trying to give al-Qa`ida restricted military documents, GPS equipment and money, was sentenced to 20 years in prison, the maximum punishment. – *AP, May 24*

May 24, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A U.S. drone killed eight militants in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *AFP, May 23*

May 25, 2012 (YEMEN): A suicide bomber in a vehicle killed at least 12 people in Hazm, a northern town controlled by Zaydi Huthi rebels. The bomber targeted a school. Al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula claimed responsibility. – *BBC, May 25; AFP, June 1*

May 25, 2012 (SOMALIA): The African Union Mission in Somalia said that al-Shabab militants have been pushed out of Afgoye, a town on the outskirts of Mogadishu. – *Voice of America, May 25*

May 25, 2012 (TURKEY): Two men in a vehicle attacked a police station in Kayseri, located in central Turkey, killing a policeman. Both men drove up to the building while firing weapons, and then one of the militants detonated a suicide bomb. Both assailants were killed. – *AFP, May 25*

May 26, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A U.S. drone targeted a building in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, killing four suspected militants. – *AP, May 26*

May 27, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): NATO forces killed al-Qa`ida's second-in-command for Afghanistan, Sakhr al-Taifi, in Kunar Province. – *PBS, May 29; Wall Street Journal, May 29*

May 27, 2012 (MALI): Al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb seized a key arms depot in Gao, located in northern Mali. The underground weapons and ammunition facility is considered one of the Malian army's "main depots" in the country. – *AFP, May 27*

May 28, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A U.S. drone killed at least five militants in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *Dawn, May 28*

May 29, 2012 (SOMALIA): Al-Shabab militants ambushed the convoy of Somali President Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmad on the road between Afgoye and Mogadishu. The president was able to return to Mogadishu safely. – *BBC, May 29*

May 31, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in a vehicle attacked a checkpoint in Kandahar Province, killing at least five policemen. – *AFP, May 30*

May 31, 2012 (IRAQ): A delivery truck packed with explosives killed at least 13 people in the mainly Shi`a Shula district of Baghdad. – *Reuters, May 31*