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About the CTC Sentinel

The Combating Terrorism Center is an independent educational and research institution based in the Department of Social Sciences at the United States Military Academy, West Point. The CTC Sentinel harnesses the Center's global network of scholars and practitioners to understand and confront contemporary threats posed by terrorism and other forms of political violence.

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Boko Haram and the Kidnapping of the Chibok Schoolgirls

By Jacob Zenn



A woman chants slogans during a rally calling for the release of the missing Chibok schoolgirls in Lagos, Nigeria. - Pius Utomi Ekpei/Getty

ON APRIL 14, 2014, Boko Haram militants kidnapped more than 250 schoolgirls from Chibok in Nigeria's northeastern Borno State. Soon after the kidnapping, reports surfaced that Boko Haram may have transferred many of the girls from Nigeria to Cameroon, Chad and as far as Central African Republic's Birao region near Sudan.¹ In a video released on May 5, 2014, Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau announced he would "sell" the schoolgirls as "slaves in the market," and on May 12 proposed that "if you want us to release your girls that we kidnapped, you must release our brethren that are held in Borno, Yobe, Kano, Kaduna, Enugu and Lagos states, as well as Abuja."²

Despite an outcry from the international community, social media and civil society, this operation was consistent with Boko Haram's previous militant activities in the Nigeria-Cameroon-Chad-Niger border region and its founder Muhammad Yusuf's non-recognition of colonial-era political boundaries that "cut off Niger and Chad and amalgamated [Borno] with infidels."³ As Shekau, who is Yusuf's former deputy, said in his May 5 statement, "we don't know Cameroon or Chad...I don't have a country. Islamiyya is what I have."⁴

Chibok Girls into Slavery - Boko Haram," *Vanguard*, May 6, 2014; "Chibok Girls: Boko Haram Proposes Prisoner Exchange," *Punch*, May 12, 2014.

3 Shaykh Muhammad Yusuf, *Taribin Musulmai* (History of Muslims), video from pre-July 2009, accessed May 2014.

4 Omonobi, "#BringBackOurGirls: We'll Sell Chibok Girls into Slavery - Boko Haram."

1 "Abducted Chibok Girls Seen in Central Africa," *Punch*, May 11, 2014.

2 Kingsley Omonobi, "#BringBackOurGirls: We'll Sell

This article analyzes Boko Haram's area of operations along the Borno-Cameroon border with a focus on kidnappings, as they have become Boko Haram's primary method of self-sustainable funding and are a tactic first introduced in northern Nigeria by Nigerian al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) militants who formed the faction Ansaru⁵ in 2012.⁶ The article reviews Boko Haram's militant networks in Nigeria and abroad from 2003 to 2012, traces Boko Haram's retreat to southern Borno and northern Cameroon after Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency in 2013, and discusses how several factions may have come together to carry out the kidnapping in Chibok in April 2014. Finally, the article suggests that "Shekau" may have become a *nom de guerre* representing all Boko Haram leaders, including the real Shekau, in a confederation. This confederation pools resources together from all factions for major attacks, such as the one in Chibok, but disagrees over two main issues: terms for a cease-fire with the Nigerian government and the killing of Muslim civilians.⁷

Boko Haram's Area of Operations

The first confrontations between Boko Haram (then called the "Nigerian Taliban") and Nigerian security forces took place in 2003 at Boko Haram's "Afghanistan" compound located two miles from Niger and less than 100 miles from Yusuf's and Shekau's hometowns in Yobe, and in 2004 near Gwoza in the Mandara Mountains along Nigeria's border with Cameroon.⁸

5 Ansaru is the abbreviated name for Jama`at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan, which in Arabic means Supporters of Muslims in the Land of Black Africans.

6 "Security Officials and Christians Are Enemies of Islam and Muslims, We Will Target and Kill Them - Says Spokesman of Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina fi Biladi Sudan, Abu Ja'afar," *Desert Herald*, June 5, 2012; "Algerian Journalist on 'Real' Identity of AQLIM Leader, AQLIM Future in Nigeria," Agence France-Presse, October 27, 2010.

7 Shekau believes a cease-fire can only be negotiated once Boko Haram has created an Islamic state or Nigeria adopts a Boko Haram-approved version of Shari`a, while other factions appear to be willing to accept a cease-fire in return for compensation for Boko Haram members killed in the July 2009 clashes and the reconstruction of mosques, as well as punishment of the government officials who took part in the crackdown on Boko Haram.

8 "Arms Smuggling to Boko Haram Threatens Camer-

After suffering losses, the Nigerian Taliban focused on preaching Salafist ideology based on the "pure teachings" of the Taliban and Usama bin Ladin and providing community services.⁹ Yusuf and other leaders, however, also dispatched members to the Sahel, Sudan, Pakistan and Afghanistan to receive funds to build *madrasas* and mosques and acquire militant training and advice from al-Qa`ida, especially after Bin Ladin declared Nigeria "ready for liberation" in 2003.¹⁰

When security forces killed Boko Haram founder Yusuf and 800 followers in July 2009, more than 100 Boko Haram members fled to the border region, the Sahel, and Somalia, while Shekau, according to one member, "hid in the desert between Chad and Sudan."¹¹

oon," Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), February 21, 2014; Aminu Abubakar, "Nigerian Troops and Islamic Militants Trade Gunfire in Mountains," Agence France-Presse, September 25, 2004.

9 Emanuel Goujon and Aminu Abubakar, "Nigeria's 'Taliban' Plot Comeback from Hide-outs," Agence France-Presse, January 11, 2006.

10 A Nigerian convert to Islam told the BBC in 2009 that he "met Yusuf two weeks after finding the sect in Maiduguri and was asked by [Yusuf] to go to Afghanistan," where he "spent three months and was trained as a bomb specialist" and was "supposed to train five people on his return, but when he did not receive his money he escaped." See also "Chapter 2 -- Country Reports: Africa Overview," U.S. Department of State, April 30, 2008, which implicates Yusuf and other "Nigerian Taliban" leaders in illegally receiving foreign currency, including funds from "an al-Qa`ida affiliate in Sudan" as well as from "two al-Qa`ida operatives in Pakistan," sending "Nigerian Taliban" members to train with AQIM in the Sahel and "passing coded messages from Pakistan to Nigerian Taliban members on how to carry out terrorist activities against American interests in Nigeria." See "Boko Haram Looks to Mali," *Africa Confidential*, November 30, 2012; "Boko Haram Scare For Nigeria's Police Boss," PM News Nigeria, July 23, 2011; Ikechukwu Nnochiri, "Danger Alert: Al-Qaeda Boss in West Africa Lives in Kano," Odili.net, April 8, 2012; "Nigerian 'Trained in Afghanistan,'" BBC, September 2, 2009.

11 An International Crisis Group report said that "in 2010-2012, Boko Haram was reported to have trained in Somalia's Lower Shabelle and Lower Juba regions, acquiring IED and suicide attack skills. Members en route to Somalia allegedly entered Kenya posing as Muslim preachers and social workers." Mamman Nur also reportedly "returned from Somalia" before he masterminded the UN Headquarters attack in August 2011. See "Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency," International Crisis Group, April 2014; "How Nur, Shekau Run Boko Haram," *Vanguard*, September

These members were aided by their pre-existing connections to al-Qa`ida and its affiliates, and Boko Haram's regional network of sub-leaders.¹² In July 2010, after AQIM's leader promised "men, weapons, and ammunition" for the "mujahidin in Nigeria," Shekau gave an interview to a blindfolded journalist in a hideout near Maiduguri, Borno State, saying that he "assumed leadership" of Boko Haram¹³ and declared to America that "jihad has begun."¹⁴

From 2010 to 2012, Shekau led Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria, while militants who trained with and received funding from AQIM and al-Shabab returned to Nigeria and established cells in northwestern Nigerian states under

3, 2011; personal interview, Idayat Hassan, Centre for Democracy and Development West Africa (CDD), May 2014; "Nigerian Taliban Reportedly Reforming to Strike Again a Year After Uprising," Agence France-Presse, July 16, 2010.

12 These sub-leaders included Mamman Nur, third-in-command, from Cameroon (although some reports suggest he is from Chadian parents); attack planner Abu Mahjin from Chad; chief logistician Abubakar Kilakam from Niger; and Saudi-connected financier Muhiddin Abdullahi from Sudan. According to *Vanguard*, "As far back as 2010, the Algerian government had said available intelligence reports confirmed that extremist Nigerian Islamic group, Boko Haram, has linked up with AQIM...[Boko Haram] sent out some six members to Algeria to learn how to make Improvised Explosive Devices. Indeed, the students, in the light of Boko Haram's bombing raids, appeared to have learnt well." See Jacob Zenn, "Northern Nigeria's Boko Haram: The Prize in al-Qaeda's Africa Strategy," The Jamestown Foundation, November 2012; "Al-Qaeda Takes Over Boko Haram," *Vanguard*, March 9, 2014.

13 Shekau announced that he formed Jama`at Ahl al-Sunna li al-Da`wa wa al-Jihad (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad), although it was commonly known as "Boko Haram," which means "Western education is sinful" in the Hausa language in Nigeria.

14 On October 2, 2010, AQIM's media wing, al-Andalus, also published a statement by Abubakar Shekau to the Shumukh al-Islam jihadist web forum, which marked the first time that AQIM ever disseminated any official message from another militant leader or group. Although al-Qa`ida core and Usama bin Ladin did not "recognize" African affiliates like Boko Haram, in 2010 AQIM, al-Qa`ida in Iraq, and al-Shabab issued condolences to the "mujahidin" and "monotheists" in Nigeria. The October 2010 statement from Shekau (which, perhaps, was written by al-Qa`ida) sent Shekau's "glad tidings" to various al-Qa`ida leaders and affiliates." See "Periodical Review July 2010 - No. 2," International Institute for Counterterrorism, August 2010.

the leadership of longtime Nigerian AQIM militant Khalid al-Barnawi.¹⁵ These northwestern cells, in contrast to Shekau's faction in Borno, specialized in sophisticated bombings that bore the "hallmark of al-Qa`ida."¹⁶ Boko Haram claimed all attacks until March 2012, when al-Barnawi led a cell that kidnapped and killed an Italian and a British engineer in Sokoto and claimed it under "al-Qa`ida in the Lands Beyond the Sahel." In January 2012, al-Barnawi had formed a new militant group called Ansaru, which attacked Nigerian soldiers and prisons in Abuja and Kogi and carried out three kidnappings in Nigeria.¹⁷ Due to a dispute over funding from AQIM, ideology and Shekau's "ruthless" leadership style, Shekau's faction reportedly leaked information about some "traitorous" Ansaru cells

¹⁵ Other leaders included Adam Kamar in Kano, Kabiru Sokoto in Sokoto, and Abu Muhammed in Kaduna. See Jide Ajani, "UN House Blast: Mastermind, Nur, Declared Wanted," *Vanguard*, September 1, 2011; "Nigerian Islamists Vow 'Fiercer' Attacks," Agence France-Presse, June 15, 2011; "Madalla Bombing: Kabiru Sokoto Says 'No Case to Answer,'" *Pilot Africa*, May 17, 2013; "Boko Haram Gets N40Million Donation From Algeria," Sahara Reporters, May 13, 2012; "North Africa Qaeda Offers to Help Nigerian Muslims," Reuters, February 1, 2010.

¹⁶ Shekau's faction focused on carrying out assassinations, church and school arson attacks, prison breaks and mass assaults on government buildings that left many Muslim civilians dead. The northwestern cells carried out bombings, including: in Jos on Christmas Day in 2010; at the Federal Police Headquarters and UN Headquarters (the first suicide bombings in Nigeria's history) and Madalla church in Abuja in 2011; and 10 church bombings in Kaduna in 2012, including on Easter. The Madalla church is in Niger State, but not far from Abuja. In Shekau's third video message on April 12, 2012, he said that "some Muslims are using the Boko Haram name to make money," but indicated that he would not take action against such individuals because they would face "ultimate punishment in the afterlife." It is possible that Shekau knew of Ansaru's formation but decided to let Ansaru exist and later use the name "Boko Haram" in videos and possibly even imposters of Shekau without retribution, although it is likely Shekau's faction leaked information about certain Ansaru cells to the Nigerian security forces.

¹⁷ Ansaru may have eliminated "al-Qa`ida" from its name to avoid international scrutiny and, per AQIM's advice, to distance itself from Boko Haram's killing of Muslim civilians. See "Barnawi, Kamar: Qaeda-linked Militants with Boko Haram Ties," Agence France-Presse, June 21, 2012; Yusuf Ali, "Kabiru Sokoto Names Boko Haram's Leaders," *The Nation*, February 14, 2012; Jide Ajani, "Horror in Sokoto - Al-Qaeda-Funded Group Killed Hostages," *Vanguard*, March 11, 2012.

to the Nigerian security forces, which contributed to Ansaru's gradual demise and necessitated al-Barnawi to reconcile with Shekau in late 2012.¹⁸

Retreat to Gwoza

After the elimination of Ansaru as a competitor, Shekau appointed new leaders to replace Ansaru's commanders, including ones close to al-Barnawi.¹⁹ After the deaths or arrests of these commanders as well as Shekau's own commanders in Yobe and Adamawa, however, Boko Haram became primarily a Borno-based movement, with 75% of its attacks in Borno during the first three months of 2013 (compared to 35% in 2012).²⁰ Only Kano remained under the influence of Mamman Nur (likely

¹⁸ Ansaru and Boko Haram had a dispute over sharing funds from AQIM and the issue of Muslim civilian deaths, but, according to the International Crisis Group, "after they reconciled, Barnawi allegedly entered into a deal by which Shekau, who had the men, would provide security cover, while Barnawi, who had the skills, would kidnap Westerners. Part of the ransom money would fund Boko Haram operations." Nonetheless, leaks led to the arrests or deaths of several Ansaru commanders as well as Abu Qaqa, who defected from Boko Haram because of Shekau's unfair treatment of non-Kanuris like Qaqa, who is an Epira from Kogi. The reconciliation was confirmed in November 2012, when Shekau released a statement in which he issued "glad tidings" to the "Islamic State of Mali" and other al-Qa`ida leaders and affiliates. See "Horror in Sokoto - Al-Qaeda-Funded Group Killed Hostages"; Alli, "Kabiru Sokoto Names Boko Haram's Leaders"; "Power Tussle in Boko Haram Led to Sect Leader's Arrest," *Leadership*, March 26, 2012; "Dozens of Boko Haram Help Mali's Rebel Seize Gao," *Vanguard*, April 9, 2012; "Mali - Mokhtar Belmokhtar, un des chefs d'Aqmi, est à Gao," Lepoint.fr, July 4, 2012; "Exclusive: The Last Days of Shekau, Boko Haram Leader," *Vanguard*, August 25, 2013; "Boko Haram Leaders Flee Hot Mali to Nigeria," *The Nation*, January 31, 2013; "Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency."

¹⁹ Perhaps as part of their reconciliation, Shekau appointed al-Barnawi's trainee, "Assalafi," in Sokoto, and his own commanders, such as Muhammed Zangina, in Kaduna. By 2013, however, the security forces arrested "Assalafi" and Zangina, while Shekau's sub-commanders in northeastern Nigeria, such as Abubakar Yola in Adamawa and Mommudu Bama in Yobe, were killed. See "Another Boko Haram Commander Killed in Shootout," PM News Nigeria, September 25, 2012; Michael Olugbode, "JTF Kills Top Boko Haram Commander in Combined Operation," *This Day*, April 28, 2013; "Nigerian Troops 'Kill Boko Haram Commander Momodu Bama,'" BBC, August 14, 2013; "Boko Haram Looks to Mali."

²⁰ These percentages are based on the author's personal statistics.

using the pseudonym "Muhammed Marwan"),²¹ who accepted a second-in-command role to Shekau. Nur's faction attacked "un-Islamic" places such as beer halls, international targets like the UN Headquarters, organized a plot on the U.S. ambassador in Abuja, and bombed motor parks in Kano and Abuja to send "messages" to the Nigerian government and traditional Muslim leaders to release Boko Haram prisoners and to offer compensation for victims of the July 2009 clashes.²²

²¹ While it is widely believed that "Muhammed Marwan" is a pseudonym, there is also speculation that Marwan may refer to a former Boko Haram "spiritual adviser" named Abdullahi Damasak. This author, however, believes that Marwan is likely a pseudonym for Mamman Nur for the following reasons: the name Muhammed Marwan may be in reference to Mamman (another spelling for Muhammed) and Marwa, Nur's hometown in Cameroon; Marwan's claim to have released the seven-member French family kidnapped in northern Cameroon in April 2013, which is in Nur's current area of operations and an operation Nur's faction likely carried out in coordination with al-Barnawi's faction; Marwan's claim to have carried out a motor park bombing in Kano, which resembles the motor park bombings in Abuja in April and May 2014, whose connection to al-Shabab and Sudanese Boko Haram networks suggest Nur may have been involved since Nur was trained by al-Shabab and Nur masterminded the two other major bombings in Abuja of the UN Headquarters and Federal Police Headquarters in 2011; Marwan's claim to be "second-in-command" to Shekau, which is consistent with Nur's natural rank in Boko Haram after Yusuf's death. Nur, like Marwan, was also opposed to Shekau's obstinate stance on negotiations and was in favor of negotiations with the government over the release of Boko Haram prisoners and compensation for the July 2009 clashes. Like Marwan, Nur was also likely based in Kano because Kano was the hub of international funding to Boko Haram; Nur's connections to al-Shabab and AQIM and involvement in the UN Headquarters attack, which was planned from Kano, suggest that Kano is where Nur would have received such funds. Marwan's absence from making public statements from his base in Kano since August 2013 may also be attributed to the fact that Nur has been reported by Cameroonian sources to be operating in northern Cameroon in early 2014. Moreover, Boko Haram commander Kabiru Sokoto said in February 2012 after his arrest that Abdullahi Damasak had already been arrested. See "Another Boko Haram Figure Speaks, Ruling Out Dialogue With Nigeria Gov't," Sahara Reporters, January 29, 2013; David Martosko, "Hillary Clinton's State Department Refused to Classify Boko Haram as a 'Terror Group' Even After it Threatened to 'Murder the U.S. Ambassador' to Nigeria," *Daily Mail*, May 15, 2014; Alli, "Kabiru Sokoto Names Boko Haram's Leaders."

²² Nur's "messages" likely included the motor park bombing in Kano (which was claimed by "Muhammed

The French-led military intervention in northern Mali in January 2013 may have indirectly revitalized Boko Haram.²³ From March to May 2013, former Ansaru, Boko Haram and other militants who fought with or learned from militants in Mali launched attacks along northeastern Borno's border with Niger and Cameroon. They attacked a military barracks in Monguno, a prison in Bama and destroyed three towns: Baga, Marte, and Maiha.²⁴ For the first time in Nigeria, militants mounted weapons on 4x4 vehicles, kidnapped government officials and their relatives to exchange for ransoms of \$10,000 to \$300,000, and supported a more ethnically and religiously inclusive ideology like Ansaru's and AQIM's—but unlike Shekau's—that called on "Muslim youths" to fight not "in the name of any sect, clan, or country," but for Islam.²⁵

Marwan") in March 2013 and likely also the two bombings in a motor park outside of Abuja in the month before Nigeria hosted the World Economic Forum on May 7, 2014.

23 An intelligence report by Nigeria's State Security Service (SSS) "revealed that some 200 persons suspected to be of Nigerian origin successfully completed their training at a camp in Mali." They reportedly fled Mali before a French airstrike in January 2013. Security experts told this author that the mounting of weapons on 4x4 vehicles in Borno after the French-led military intervention in Mali was likely a tactic learned from Mali. See "French Foreign Minister Says Documents Show Nigeria's Boko Haram Trained in North Mali," Fox News, November 14, 2013; "B'Haram's Anti-Aircraft Training Camp Uncovered in Niger," *Punch*, February 19, 2014; "Over 200 Nigerians Train as Terrorists in Mali, Says Report," *Nigeria Political Economist*, May 9, 2014.

24 "Boko Haram Claims Responsibility For Attacks in Baga, Bama; Promises More On The Way," Sahara Reporters, May 13, 2013; "Boko Haram Latest Threats: Maiduguri JTF Spokesperson, Sagir Musa Responds," Sahara Reporters, May 20, 2013; "Boko Haram Militants Shows Off Weapons 'Captured' From an Army Barracks," Sahara TV, April 29, 2013; Ndahi Marama, "Kidnapped Monguno Regains Freedom After Payment of Ransom," *Vanguard*, May 7, 2013.

25 According to Boko Haram spokesman Abu Qaqa after his arrest in 2012, Boko Haram members who refused to go on suicide missions faced the "death penalty." He also said that Shekau's tendency to select non-Kanuris for such missions alienated members from other ethnic groups. Some members also preferred Mamman Nur as leader over Shekau because Shekau's focus was domestic, while Nur's was more transnational. See Yusuf Ali, "How Bombers are Chosen, by Boko Haram Suspect," *The Nation*, February 9, 2012; "Boko Haram Militants Shows Off Weapons 'Captured' From an Army Ba-

In response to these attacks, President Jonathan ordered a state of emergency in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa on May 14, 2013, which coincided with the creation of the civilian Joint Task Force (JTF) to track down Boko Haram militants.²⁶ Boko Haram's foot soldiers abandoned Maiduguri and retreated from the deserts and swamplands of northeastern Borno and Lake Chad to mountainous rural areas near Gwoza in southern Borno, which is 15 miles from Chibok, where the 250 schoolgirls would later be kidnapped. Gwoza is also where "university-educated Nigerian Taliban" members carried out abductions of Christian women in 2004 until they were expelled by Nigerian troops and "vigilantes," the latter of which were a predecessor to the civilian JTF.²⁷

Context of the Chibok Kidnapping

In 2013 and early 2014, Boko Haram's newly formed "special kidnapping squad," which may be part of al-Barnawi's faction, kidnapped several foreigners in northern Cameroon and brought them to Borno, while Nur's faction utilized Nur's "guerrilla expertise" in the border region and contacts with Kanuri tribal elders in Cameroon to facilitate hostage negotiations.²⁸ The total ransom money

racks"; "Twenty Islamists Killed in Northeast Nigeria: Military," Agence France-Presse, March 3, 2013; "New Boko Haram Sect Emerges, Shows Off Large Cache Of Arms And Ammunitions," Information Nigeria, May 2, 2013.

26 "Nigerian Islamists Retreat, Apparently to Fight Another Day," Reuters, June 7, 2013.

27 In December 2013, 80% of Boko Haram attacks were in areas of Borno south of Maiduguri—the most limited area of operations in its history. Gwoza is also about one mile from Cameroon and six miles from Nigeria's Sambisa Forest. Its population is approximately 50% Christian, 40% Muslim and 10% animist. See "Nigerian Christians Brace for More 'Taleban' Attack," Nigeria/Africa Masterweb News Report, March 1, 2005; "Army 'Corners' Boko Haram Leader, Shekau, in Borno Hills - Punch Newspaper," Sahara Reporters, July 26, 2013.

28 The first such kidnapping was in February 2013, when militants kidnapped a seven-member French family in Waza, Cameroon, who were released in Gwoza in April 2013 for \$3.14 million from the Cameroonian government and in exchange for 19 prisoners in Cameroonian and Nigerian prisons. A Nigerian journalist told the author that this ransom money "did not go to Shekau." The second kidnapping was in November 2013, when militants kidnapped a French priest in Nguechewe, Cameroon, and released him weeks later on "compassionate grounds," but also in return for a weapons smuggler in a Cameroonian prison and an undisclosed sum of money (report-

received and prisoners exchanged as a result of these kidnappings in Cameroon as well as the kidnappings of 12 women in Bama in May 2013—who were exchanged for the release of 90 Boko Haram members, their wives and children, and possibly ransom money—likely incentivized Boko Haram to carry out more kidnappings, such as the one in Chibok, to pressure the Nigerian and Cameroonian governments to cede to Boko Haram's demands for the exchange of more ransom money and prisoners.²⁹ To protect its operational space in northern Cameroon, Boko Haram issued a series of warnings to Cameroon in fliers signed in Shekau's name saying that vigilantes (*keskes*) would be targeted and "Cameroonians, we have not attacked you; do not attack us."³⁰ The

edly \$12.5 million from the Cameroonian government). A third kidnapping took place in April 2014, when militants kidnapped two Italian priests and a Canadian nun in Tchéré, Cameroon—near Nur's reported hometown of Marwa—and brought them toward the Nigerian border (their location remains unknown). A fourth kidnapping of 10 Chinese engineers in Waza, Cameroon, took place on May 17, 2014, and, like the Tchéré kidnapping, they were probably taken to Borno. Although the third kidnapping remains unclaimed, suspicions fell on Boko Haram, while the first one of the French family was first claimed by Boko Haram, but in a statement that, like AQIM and previous Ansaru statements, was in Arabic and criticized France for the intervention in Mali. The second kidnapping of the French priest was claimed by Boko Haram in "coordination" with Ansaru. See "Senior Officials in Cameroon Suspected of Complicity With Nigerian Islamic Sect," Cameroon-Info.net, April 11, 2014; "Abducted Chinese Likely in Nigeria - Cameroon," *Vanguard*, May 17, 2014; Guibai Guitama, "Cameroon - Libération du père Georges Vandenberg: Le négociateur désigné de Boko Haram réclame son argent," *L'Oeil du Sabel*, January 6, 2014; Ola Audu, "Boko Haram Threatens JTF Spokesperson, Demands Prisoners Exchange for French Nationals," *Premium Times*, March 18, 2013; "Nigeria's Boko Haram 'Got \$3m Ransom' to Free Hostages," BBC, April 26, 2013; "Taking the Hostage Road," *Africa Confidential*, March 15, 2013; "Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency."

29 One estimate suggested that Boko Haram received up to \$70 million in total from al-Qa'ida funding streams. In addition, an anonymous expert suggested to the author that some of the money paid to AQIM for four Frenchmen in northern Mali "ended up in Boko Haram's pockets." See Jide Ajani, "Funding of Terror Network: 'Boko Haram Got Over N11bn to Kill and Maim,'" *Vanguard*, May 4, 2014; Chris Okocha et al., "Women, Children Detainees to be Released First, Says FG," *This Day*, May 23, 2013; Senator Iroegbu, "JTF: 'We've Rescued 9 Hostages Held by Boko Haram,'" *This Day*, May 25, 2013.

30 The fliers were released between December 2013 and

fliers coincided with religious leaders from Borno recruiting youths among Cameroon's Kanuri population using persuasion and financial inducements, increased arms trafficking to Boko Haram along Cameroon's border with

“There are likely several Boko Haram factions, but they come together in a confederation for major attacks, such as the kidnapping in Chibok, and also coordinate their public relations strategy.”

Chad, militants in Borno retreating to northern Cameroon and Chad after attacks, and the assassination of informants in Cameroon.³¹ It was in the context of these kidnap-for-ransom operations and a rear base in northern Cameroon that the Chibok kidnapping occurred on April 14, 2014.

Local Boko Haram unit leaders in Gwoza, such as Ibrahim Tada Ngalyike,³² may have carried out the

February 2014 in northern Cameroon. See “Boko Haram Met en Garde le Cameroun,” *Le Septentrion*, February 2014.

31 Farouk Chotia, “Will Nigeria’s Abducted Schoolgirls Ever be Found?” BBC, May 12, 2014; “Are Nigeria’s Neighbors Safe Havens for Boko Haram?” Voice of America, March 25, 2014; David Wemai, “Cameroun - Goulfey: Une impressionnante cache d’armes découverte,” *L’Oeil du Sahel*, March 27, 2014; “288 Rifles, 35 Rockets Seized From Terrorists in Cameroon,” *Vanguard*, April 1, 2014; “Cameroun: Boko Haram recrute des jeunes à la frontière avec le Nigeria,” *Jeune Africa*, April 3, 2014; “Arms Smuggling to Boko Haram Threatens Cameroon”; Moki Edwin Kindzeka, “Boko Haram Attacks Near Border Spark Fear in Cameroon,” Voice of America, January 17, 2014; Stephanie Gosk, “Nigerian Neighbor Cameroon Faces ‘Phantom Enemy’ Boko Haram,” NBC News, May 20, 2014.

32 In late 2013, Ngalyike, who was a militant known for “using traditional charms that make him disappear,” began attacking security forces and civilian JTF members and seizing teenage girls who, like the Chibok schoolgirls, were forced to wear veils and cook for Ngalyike’s foot-soldiers. The name “Tada Ngalyike” suggests that he is Dghwede from near Gwoza. Ngalyike’s unit hid in the mountains outside of Gwoza, and also received “guests” from Maiduguri, which may have helped Boko

kidnapping in Chibok in coordination with Boko Haram’s factional leaders, including Aminu “Tashen-Ilmi,”³³ Nur, al-Barnawi and Shekau.³⁴ Tashen-Ilmi was a member of the “Nigerian Taliban” when that group carried out similar small-scale kidnappings and could have leveraged contacts for the Chibok operation with his former co-disciples, Shekau and Nur, the latter of whom was then operating in northern Cameroon.³⁵ Similarly, Nur’s faction has possibly coordinated kidnappings with al-Barnawi in Cameroon and Borno since February 2013, and the latter’s faction may have carried out the kidnapping and cross-border transfer of some girls, “marketed” the attack with Shekau’s “fear-mongering” video on May 5 and proof-of-life video on May 12, and then transferred some girls deeper into the Sahel or Central Africa.

Factions and Faux Shekaus

Al-Barnawi may be outside of Nigeria, possibly in Niger, where some Ansaru militants retreated after the French intervention in northern Mali, but his faction operates regionally, including in

Haram plan its sporadic, but large-scale attacks in Maiduguri, such as on Maiduguri Air Base in December 2013 and Giwa Barracks in March 2014. It is also possible that Tashen-Ilmi, Shekau and Maiduguri-based operational leaders in coordination with militants in the Mandara Mountains like Ngalyike are responsible for carrying out massacres of villages in southern Borno, targets which are rejected by other Boko Haram factions, including Mamman Nur’s and the *shura* that broke from Shekau in July 2013. See Joe Brock, “Insight: Boko Haram, Taking to Hills, Seize Slave ‘Brides,’” Reuters, November 17, 2013; Kingsley Omonobi et al., “Chibok: American Marines Locate Abducted Girls in Sambisa Forest,” *Vanguard*, May 10, 2014.

33 Tashen-Ilmi is from a town near Gwoza and was a former “Nigerian Taliban” member involved in the clashes in 2003 and 2004. He also was a University of Maiduguri dropout who, like Shekau, previously believed Yusuf was too “soft” and that “Bin Ladin does the work of God.” See “Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency”; Emmanuel Goujon & Aminu Abubakar, “Nigeria’s ‘Taliban’ Plot Comeback from Hide-outs,” Agence France-Presse, January 11, 2006.

34 Another reported factional leader is “Abu Sumayya,” although in an interview he referred to Shekau as the leader of Boko Haram. See “Interview with One Mujahid from Jama`at Ahl al-Sunna li al-Da`wa wa al-Jihad in Nigeria,” As-Sawarim Media Foundation, May 26, 2014.

35 “Suspected Boko Haram Militants Attack in Cameroon,” Channel 4 News, May 17, 2014.

Nigeria and Cameroon.³⁶ “Muhammed Marwan”—who is likely Mamman Nur—claimed responsibility for releasing a seven-member French family kidnapped in northern Cameroon in April 2013 for \$3.14 million and says he is in control of Boko Haram’s “arms and finances.”³⁷ These arms and finances are likely derived from kidnappings with al-Barnawi’s faction, weapons deals along the Chadian-Cameroonian border, and contacts between Nur’s faction and AQIM, al-Shabab and sponsors in Sudan and possibly the Persian Gulf region.³⁸ Locally rooted factional leaders, such as Ngalyike and Tashen-Ilmi, who may have been involved in the Chibok kidnapping and are likely in Borno or along the border with Cameroon, can self-finance their factions through looting villages as “spoils of war.”³⁹

As for Shekau, he was reportedly injured in northern Mali in 2012, returned to Borno after the French-led military intervention, and recovered from wounds in Amchide, Cameroon, in August 2013, where, according to some reports, he died—but Shekau emerged

36 Evidence of Ansaru’s operations in Niger include the statement of an Ansaru member, Abu Ali al-Nigeria, in the video that Mokhtar Belmokhtar’s faction and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) released after they jointly carried out suicide attacks on a French uranium mine in Arlit, Niger, and on the military barracks in Agadez, Niger, in retaliation for Abu Zeid’s death and Niger’s support of France’s “war on Shari`a” in Mali in 2013. Ansaru may also have taken part in the June 1, 2013, attack on a prison in Niamey, Niger’s capital, that freed 22 prisoners, including a long-time AQIM member, and may have intended to free several detained Boko Haram or Ansaru members. See “Le Mujao revendique le double attentat et promet qu’il y en aura d’autres,” Radio France Internationale, May 24, 2013; “Niger: Boko Haram Prisoners Tried to Escape,” Associated Press, June 2, 2013; Ola Audu, “How Boko Haram Turned to Kidnapping to Raise Funds in Borno,” *Premium Times*, May 20, 2014.

37 For an explanation of some reasons why Niger’s Diffa has not seen the same level of Boko Haram-related security threats as compared to Cameroon, see Jacob Zenn, “Niger’s Security Strategy in Boko Haram’s Badlands,” The Soufan Group, February 12, 2014; “We are Ready to Accept Amnesty – Boko Haram Leaders,” Codewit World News, April 21, 2013.

38 Regis Soubrouillard, “Interview with Alain Chouet, Former Director of Intelligence at the French General Directorate of External Security,” *Marianne*, May 20, 2014.

39 Chesa Chesa, “Boko Haram Kills Over 100, Abducts Eight More Girls in Borno,” *Daily Independent*, May 6, 2014.

in a credible September 2013 video.⁴⁰ In August 2013, Shekau may nonetheless have been deposed in a “coup” by members of his *shura*, after which Shekau’s appointed spokesman, Abu Zamira, announced that “commanders as far afield as Niger, Chad, Sudan and Cameroon” agreed to a cease-fire with the Nigerian government and a hiatus in suicide bombings.⁴¹ In late 2013, “Muhammed Marwan”—likely Nur—also announced that he supported the

40 In the video, Shekau taunted President Jonathan, Margaret Thatcher, President Obama, Benjamin Netanyahu and President Hollande saying they “should bury their heads in shame” before he “announces to the world that I am alive today with Allah’s authority alone...I withdrew myself from public view and remained silent. You can assume that this is a fake image of mine (laughing)... Can you believe telling the world I was injured in a battle in Sambisa Forest and taken to Amchide for treatment and died (laughing).” Moreover, Shekau’s detained family members have never claimed he was dead, nor have detained Boko Haram militants. There have also been no “martyrdom” videos of Shekau, and the U.S. foreign terrorist designation of Shekau in 2012 (as well as al-Barnawi and Adam Kambar) and recent statements by U.S. officials suggest that the U.S. government believes Shekau is alive. See “Boko Haram National Leader, Abubakar Shekau, Narrowly Escapes Arrest,” *Premium Times*, April 6, 2012; Aminu Abubakar, “Boko Haram Leader (Shekau) Escapes Arrest In Kano - Wife Arrested,” *Nigerian Tribune*, March 5, 2012; “Dozens of Boko Haram Help Mali’s Rebel Seize Gao”; Jacob Zenn, “Nigerians in Gao: Was Boko Haram Really Active in Northern Mali?” *African Arguments*, January 20, 2014; “JTF Claims Boko Haram Leader, Abubakar Shekau, May Have Died Of Gunshot Wounds,” *Premium Times*, August 19, 2013; Hamza Idris, “Boko Haram’s Shekau Likely Dead, JTF Says,” *Daily Trust*, August 20, 2013.

41 Based on Yusuf’s and Shekau’s video from before July 2009, it is likely that Shekau’s position is that negotiations can only take place with the Nigerian government once an Islamic state is established. See “Shekau Shot, Deposed - Boko Haram Spiritual Leader,” *Vanguard*, August 2, 2013; “Boko Haram Announces Peace Discussions,” Nigeria Village Square, July 20, 2013; “Nur Killed OBJ’s Host Fugu - Security Sources,” *Vanguard*, September 19, 2011; “Muhammad Marwana ya Kalubalanci Abubakar Shekau” (Muhammad Marwana Challenges Abubakar Shekau), Voice of America (Hausa), July 20, 2013; “Gwamnatin Najeriya da Boko Haram sun yi Ikararin cim ma Yarjejeniyar Tsagaita Wuta” (The Nigerian Government and Boko Haram Say They Have Agreed to a Ceasefire), Radio France Internationale (Hausa), July 8, 2013; “Da Alamun Akwai Baraka Taskanin Shekau da Marwana” (Apparently, There is a Rift Between Shekau and Marwana), Voice of America (Hausa), July 15, 2013; “Kwamandojin Boko Haram sun bar Shekau Cikin Rana” (Boko Haram Commanders Abandon Shekau), Voice of America (Hausa), July 22, 2013.

new *shura*’s cease-fire and that “Shekau lost leadership” of Boko Haram, despite some followers remaining loyal to Shekau.⁴²

Even despite this alleged coup in August 2013, it is likely that Nur’s faction and other militants operating in the Borno-Cameroon border region still used Shekau’s name as a *nom de guerre* to claim attacks or featured imposters of Shekau in Boko Haram video statements.⁴³ Thus far, only one self-proclaimed pro-negotiation factional leader, Abu Mohammed Abdulaziz, publicly stated in March 2013 that an “imposter” appeared in a Boko Haram video of Shekau, while in March 2014 Nigerian media also began speculating about the “changing faces of Shekau.”⁴⁴ Shekau’s faction, however, dismissed Abdulaziz as a “fake” in 2012 and again in March

42 “Leader of Boko Haram Faction in Official Talks With the Nigerian Gov’t Claims Responsibility For Deadly Kano Bombings, Says Abubakar Shekau Still Alive,” Sahara Reporters, August 4, 2013.

43 There is precedent for using *nom de guerres* in Boko Haram, such as when Abu Qaqa was arrested in 2012, but for the next half-year Boko Haram insisted he was not the real “Abu Qaqa,” despite the ensuing hiatus in Boko Haram statements and Boko Haram’s killing of Qaqa’s father in retribution for Qaqa’s revelations about Boko Haram. Moreover, Nur, al-Barnawi, Abu Zamira and Tashen-Ilmi—as well as all former Ansaru *shura* members—cover their faces with veils or do not appear publicly or in videos, which would make them more likely to allow *faux* Shekaus and the real Shekau to remain the official “face” of Boko Haram while they operate behind-the-scenes. Other reasons for the use of multiple Shekaus include that Shekau was debilitated or away in Mali or another country for a period of time, which necessitated substitutes, or that after the U.S. “foreign terrorist” designation of Shekau in 2012 he went underground and used multiple images as a form of deception. See “Boko Haram Announces Peace Discussions”; Adam Nossiter, “Jihadist’s Face Taunts Nigeria From Shadows,” *New York Times*, May 20, 2014.

44 Abu Mohammed Abdulaziz claimed that Nur was on his negotiation team in 2012, but distanced himself from the kidnapping of the French family from northern Cameroon in 2013, which Nur’s faction may have carried out with al-Barnawi’s faction. “Muhammed Marwan”—who is likely Nur—also refuted a January 2013 cease-fire announced by Abdulaziz. This suggests that Abdulaziz may at one point have been in Nur’s faction. A Nigerian politics blog, Beegoogle’s Blog, began holding discussion on whether there were imposters of Shekau as early as August 20, 2013. See Ndahi Marama, “Boko Haram Agrees to a Cease Fire,” *Vanguard*, January 28, 2013; “The Changing Faces of Shekau,” PM News Nigeria, March 25, 2014.

2013 and reiterated that peace would only come when Shari’ah is adopted in Nigeria.⁴⁵

The possibility of multiple factions using Shekau as their “spokesman” or at least Shekau’s name with look-alikes in videos suggests that Shekau’s “stamp-of-approval” is relevant for showing unity or enhancing credibility. Moreover, the stage-managed settings of Boko Haram’s videos of Shekau, including scripts and props such as a *mishwak* (a teeth-cleaning twig) and the same carpet and armored personnel carrier in several videos, suggest that all factions now operate under one “Boko Haram” umbrella and coordinate a sophisticated external propaganda campaign, with Ansaru either dormant or using the name “Boko Haram” to claim its operations. Nonetheless, in addition to his “spokesman” role, Shekau likely also retains an operational role in ordering—and often claiming—his followers’ massacres of university students, such as in Yobe in September 2013, or of villages in Borno and large-scale attacks on military bases in Maiduguri.

Conclusion

There are likely several Boko Haram factions, but they come together in a confederation for major attacks, such as the kidnapping in Chibok, and also coordinate their public relations strategy. If their demands are met in the Chibok kidnapping, all factions could see the release of dozens of prisoners and ransom payments for all leaders in exchange for the return of some or all of

45 Complicating the issue of the alleged “imposter” that Abdulaziz claimed appeared as “Shekau” in the March 1, 2013, video is the fact that this video came out in one public version with Shekau speaking in Hausa, while a second version that was never released publicly but obtained by the author featured Shekau speaking in a language other than Hausa or Arabic, which may mean that two versions of the video were produced, with the internal version also containing “highlight clips” of other Boko Haram commanders, including one called “Abu Fatima,” who was associated with Ansaru in 2012. See “Statement by Boko Haram’s Spokesperson Debunking Reports of Dialogue with the Nigerian Government,” Sahara Reporters, August 23, 2012; Haruna Umar, “Boko Haram Leader Denies Peace Talks with Nigeria,” Associated Press, March 3, 2013; Chuku Okocha, “We Are Not Ghosts, Boko Haram Tells Jonathan,” *This Day*, March 14, 2013; “Another Islamic Sect Emerges to Counter Boko Haram?” *Desert Herald*, June 2, 2012.

the schoolgirls. Since it is now clear that multiple leaders command Boko Haram fighters, it is likely that Boko Haram could evolve in several new ways.⁴⁶

First, if Boko Haram maintains its safe havens in Borno and northern Cameroon, it may become a resource for violent members of other predominantly Muslim ethnic groups in Nigeria—such as Fulanis in Zamfara or Kogi—and nearby countries—such as Central African Republic—to train for attacks on rival Christian ethnic groups with whom they have land or other disputes.⁴⁷

Second, Boko Haram will likely expand its focus outside of northern Nigeria, especially if leaders like al-Barnawi and Nur are operating in Niger and Cameroon, potentially training Séléka⁴⁸ militants,⁴⁹ and acquiring new funding

46 “Muhammed Marwan” (who is likely Mamman Nur), Abu Zamira and other factional leaders have stated that Shekau was deposed, lost leadership of Boko Haram, or that Shekau now controlled a reduced following within Boko Haram. Nur’s and al-Barnawi’s factions have also likely coordinated and introduced attacks beyond Shekau’s known capabilities and area of influence, such as kidnappings in Cameroon. Notably, the first video claim of a kidnapping in Cameroon of the seven-member French family was the first time suspicions emerged that a *faux* Shekau was used in the split-screen video with the family, possibly because Nur’s faction carried out the attack and claimed it in Shekau’s name with imposters and possibly to disguise that the \$3.14 ransom really went to Nur and al-Barnawi—and not Shekau. Moreover, Shekau never had full control over cells in Kano or northwestern Nigeria, with some commanders such as Kabiru Sokoto denying he was in Shekau’s faction, and Shekau was not known to have strong ties to Sudan, but the motor park bombings in Abuja in April and May 2014 were masterminded by individuals tied to Sudan, suggesting that leaders other than Shekau are coordinating major attacks.

47 Boko Haram also reportedly recruits among Hausas, Fulania, Kanuris, Tuareg and Toubous in Niger. See Friday Olorok, “Fulani Herdsmen are Terrorists, Says ex-Zamfara Gov,” *Punch*, March 31, 2014; Ike Abonyi, “Boko Haram: SSS Bursts New Cell in Kogi,” *This Day*, November 21, 2013; “Bomb Blasts Rock Jos Market,” *Vanguard*, May 20, 2014.

48 Séléka is a predominantly Muslim rebel coalition in Central African Republic, which includes Sudanese and Chadian fighters. It was formerly led by Michel Djotodia, who overthrew President François Bozizé on March 24, 2013.

49 Séléka began carrying out kidnappings in Cameroon in May 2014. Multiple sources suggested there is some level of Boko Haram presence in Central African Republic and likely mutual networks in Sudan and Chad, while pic-

and weapons to revive Ansaru, but these operations may be carried out under a new group name if schisms with Shekau’s faction widen or if the Chibok negotiations expose factional fault-lines.⁵⁰

Third, Boko Haram’s ideology will become less Nigeria-centric and more trans-regional to attract a new Sahelo-Saharan recruiting pool, but its ideology may still resonate most deeply with Kanuris of the Nigeria-Cameroon-Chad-Niger border region.⁵¹

tures of Séléka militants inscribing “Bocouharamé [Boko Haram]” on their uniforms shows that Boko Haram has influence among some of its fighters. As of May 9, 2014, it was reported that “almost 50 girls who speak only English but not any of the Central African languages, or those of Sudan or yet still those of Chad, were temporarily carried on board a truck confined in Birao,” possibly referring to the girls from Chibok. See “Kidnapped Nigerian High School Girls Spotted in Northern CAR,” *Kangbi Ndara*, May 9, 2014; Hanna McNeish, “Lawless CAR Attracting Terrorists’ Attention,” *Voice of America*, November 22, 2013; Michelle Shephard, “Will Central African Republic become a Battleground for Religious Radicals?” *Toronto Star*, March 27, 2014; Moki Edwin Kindzeka, “Cameroon Blames Séléka Rebels for Hostage Taking,” *Voice of America*, May 15, 2014; “Abducted Chibok Girls Seen in Central Africa,” *Punch*, March 11, 2014; “Central African Republic: Violence Leaves ‘30 Dead,” *BBC*, April 9, 2014; Adam Nossiter, “New Threat in Nigeria as Militants Split Off,” *New York Times*, April 23, 2013; Krista Larson, “In Central African Republic, Diamonds Are Seleka Rebels’ Best Friend,” *Associated Press*, May 6, 2013.

50 Nonetheless, all factions will likely for the short-term continue to eschew bureaucratic and administrative structures and the unpopular forms of Shari`a that AQIM and al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula established in northern Mali and Zinjibar, Yemen, in 2012 and 2010, respectively, and the knowledge of which has likely been passed on to Boko Haram.

51 This was exemplified by Shekau’s scripted May 5, 2014, video statement, in which he stated “we are together with Usman dan Fodio” as well as his recalling past instances of Muslim-Christian violence, which are two cornerstones of Ansaru’s former statements and that are unheard of in Boko Haram statements since Yusuf’s death and may appeal to all West Africans, including militants in Central African Republic. Recent surveys of armed militants operating alongside Boko Haram in Borno and northern Cameroon reveal that the militants’ goal is to “knock out” Nigeria and then “create a Sahelo-Saharan Islamic Empire that mirrors the boundaries of the pre-colonial Kanem-Borno empire, which extended from Borno through Cameroon, Chad and Niger to southern Libya and Sudan.” To such militants, the battle with France in northern Mali in 2013 was a “prep” for the real battle, which is to take place in Nigeria and which

Fourth, Boko Haram may prepare for retaliatory attacks on Western targets in southern Nigeria or abroad and take advantage of its networks in Sudan and possibly the United Kingdom if a regional or international coalition collaborates with Nigeria to launch a “total war” on Boko Haram or rescue the schoolgirls from Chibok.⁵² Moreover, launching a series of attacks throughout Nigeria would force Nigeria’s military to “divert its attention” from Borno and weaken a renewed offensive against Boko Haram along the Nigeria-Cameroon border.⁵³

is facilitated by Kanuris’ sense of grievance for their lost empire and inspired by the ideal that an Islamic state is possible—as represented by Iran’s “Islamic Revolution” in 1979. See personal interview, Idayat Hassan, Centre for Democracy and Development West Africa (CDD), May 2014.

52 Evidence of this includes: Shekau’s threats on the refineries in the Niger Delta in his past three videos; Boko Haram’s possible coordination with Séléka in transferring the kidnapped girls to Central African Republic; Shekau’s calls in 2013 for “brethren” from “Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Syria” to join Boko Haram; Boko Haram’s attacks on bridges connecting Nigeria to Cameroon and on prisons where Boko Haram members are held in Cameroon and first reported “ambush” on Nigerien troops in Diffa, Niger, in May 2014; the two bombings in a motor park outside of Abuja in April and May 2014 in coordination with networks in Sudan and possibly the United Kingdom; and the kidnapping of 10 Chinese workers in Cameroon on May 17, 2014, one week after China agreed to support Nigeria to combat Boko Haram. Boko Haram’s connections to the United Kingdom can be seen in at least three incidents: Kabiru Sokoto, the plotter of several bombings of churches in the Middle Belt with AQIM funding, was arrested in 2012 with a ticket in hand for London; al-Muntada Trust in the United Kingdom reportedly funded Islamic charities in Sudan in the 2000s, which also funded Boko Haram; and the mastermind of a motor park bombing in Abuja in April 2014 was a UK citizen of Nigerian descent, who was arrested in Sudan. See John Irish and Elizabeth Pineau, “West Africa Leaders Vow to Wage ‘Total War’ on Boko Haram,” *Reuters*, May 17, 2014; “Cameroon: Boko Haram Said Attack Barracks, Free Two Detained ‘High Profile’ Fighters in North,” *Sahara Reporters*, May 5, 2014; Adolara Lamissa, “Nigerian Islamic Sect Intends to Attack Maroua Central Prison,” *Le Jour*, May 9, 2014; “Niger Arrests 14 Suspected Boko Haram After Troop Ambush,” *Reuters*, May 6, 2014; Yusuf Alli, “Untold Story of Kabiru Sokoto,” *The Nation*, January 22, 2012; Jamie Doward, “Peer Raises Fears Over UK Charity’s Alleged Links to Boko Haram,” *Guardian*, September 9, 2012.

53 When Suleiman Muhammed, an ethnic Yoruba Boko Haram commander in Kano, was arrested in 2012, he said Boko Haram “decided to shift to the South in order to divert the attention of security agencies, which are on the trail of its members in the North.” See “Captive Eth-

Finally, even if a cease-fire is reached with some factions, and Boko Haram is limited to Borno or sporadic attacks in Kano, Abuja, and Jos, it will still have the potential to cause instability in Nigeria, including army mutinies and defections, violence during the upcoming February 2015 election season, or a “war” between Christians and Muslims if it launches a renewed series of attacks on churches in the Middle Belt or extends its operations to majority Christian areas of southern Nigeria.⁵⁴ As such, Boko Haram can still punch above its weight in Nigeria with attacks that have far-reaching ripple effects on political stability, as seen by the ongoing fallout from the Chibok attack.

Jacob Zenn is an analyst of African and Eurasian Affairs for The Jamestown Foundation and a consultant on countering violent extremism, international law of freedom of association, and socio-cultural analysis for geospatial visualization. Mr. Zenn speaks French and Arabic and carried out field research in the northern Nigeria-Cameroon-Chad-Niger border region three times between 2012 and 2014. He is currently researching Boko Haram's connections to Central Asian militants in a Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO) monograph. Mr. Zenn holds a Juris Doctor degree from Georgetown University Law Center and a certificate in international studies from the Johns Hopkins-SAIS campus in Nanjing, China.

The ISIL's Stand in the Ramadi-Falluja Corridor

By Michael Knights

SINCE DECEMBER 30, 2013, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has sought to carve out an area of control in the Iraqi cities of Ramadi and Falluja, as well as in the Euphrates River delta between these urban areas. These locations are replete with symbolic and strategic significance for the ISIL. The movement's forerunner, al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI),¹ fought in the iconic twin battles for Falluja in March and November 2004, an event that fanned the flames of Iraq's Sunni insurgency for years afterwards. In late 2006, Anbar tribes turned decisively against AQI and its affiliates in the provincial capital of Ramadi, beginning the movement's near-fatal deterioration.² These cities and their outlying rural satellites continue to be key terrain: the Ramadi-Falluja corridor is just 22 miles from the capital's international airport and sits astride the country's main trucking highways to Jordan and Syria. Iraqi security forces have been excluded from Falluja—a city with a population of more than 300,000 on Baghdad's doorstep—for nearly five months.

This article recounts how the ISIL spread into Ramadi and Falluja, why it has failed to secure control of Ramadi, and the conditions that have led to its present control of Falluja. It finds that while the ISIL's activities in the Ramadi-Falluja corridor are

concerning, the extent of the movement's real control of the area is debatable. Furthermore, the ISIL may have overreached by committing itself to the defense of terrain, particularly in urban areas so close to the Iraqi government's logistical bases around Baghdad. If current trends continue, the ISIL's gambit in the Ramadi-Falluja corridor could bring a strategic reversal for the movement within the Iraqi theater.

Opening Moves

Throughout 2013, the Iraqi government had chafed at the existence of two “Arab Spring”-style Sunni Arab protest sites in Ramadi and Falluja.³ On December 28, 2013, the influential Iraqi cleric `Abd al-Malik al-Sa`di issued a statement from Jordan calling on Sunnis to defend the protest camp, which government forces were massing against.⁴ Armed tribal forces were fully mobilized by December 30, when Iraqi forces suspended local cellphone and internet communications and began to bulldoze the Ramadi and Falluja protest sites. Al-Sa`di called on security force members to defect and for all Sunnis to rise up.⁵ Tribal forces in northern Ramadi repelled Iraqi Army 1st division troops from the sit-in square. Tribal fighters also routed newly-arrived Emergency Response Brigade forces from various police stations in Ramadi city.⁶ The arrival of these predominately Shi`a forces from the southern city of Kut stoked tensions and contributed to the tribal backlash.⁷ To restore calm,

3 The Ramadi “sit-in” site is called the “Pride & Dignity Square” and is located north of Ramadi city at a major intersection on Highway 11. The Falluja site is immediately east of Falluja city on Highway 11.

4 On the same night, Iraqi special forces tried to enforce an arrest warrant in Ramadi on `Ali al-`Alwani, the brother of well-known Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) parliamentarian Ahmad al-`Alwani. When tribal bodyguards sought to resist, a firefight resulted in the death of `Ali al-`Alwani and his sister, as well as the arrest of MP Ahmad al-`Alwani. For a full account of the events leading up to and following December 28, 2013, see “Maliki Targets Ramadi Protest Site,” *Inside Iraqi Politics*, January 8, 2014, pp. 2-8.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 5-7.

6 Personal interview, Iraqi National Intelligence Service official, May 9, 2014.

7 Personal interview, Jaber al-Jaberi, Iraqi MP and Falluja negotiator, Baghdad, March 11, 2014. The use of southern Shi`a SWAT teams in northern Sunni areas is a common cause of localized tensions. On April 23, 2013, southern SWAT teams killed more than 50 protes-

nic Yoruba Boko Haram Kingpin Says ‘We Planned To Invade Lagos, Onitsha, Ibadan, Enugu and Warri Too’; Says ‘Terrorists Feeling The Impact Of The Security Crackdown.’ Beegagle’s Blog, May 17, 2012.

54 Nigeria’s Middle Belt, which includes Kaduna, Jos (Plateau State), and Abuja, is a region of central Nigeria populated by diverse ethnic groups. It is where majority Muslim northern Nigeria and majority Christian southern Nigeria meet and clash, particularly over land use and during election seasons. Also see Ibanga Isine, “Boko Haram Wants War Between Christians, Muslims in Nigeria – Jonathan,” *Premium Times*, May 5, 2014.

1 There has never been an organization with the name “al-Qa`ida in Iraq.” This name, however, has referred to the fighters in al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad, Tanzim al-Qa`ida fi Bilad al-Rafidayn, Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin, Hilf al-Muttaybin, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) and now finally the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). During the first Falluja battle, these fighters fought under the name al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad, under the command of Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi. Al-Zarqawi then declared his *bay`a* (oath) to Usama bin Ladin, and Bin Ladin accepted it in October 2004. At that point, the organization’s name was changed to Tanzim al-Qa`ida fi Bilad al-Rafidayn. This article refers to all these fighters as AQI.

2 For a good collection of first-hand Iraqi accounts of the tribal “awakening” in Anbar, see Gary Montgomery and Timothy McWilliams eds., *Al-Anbar Awakening Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives, From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004-2009* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University, 2009).

the Ramadi-based Anbar provincial council negotiated a withdrawal of Iraqi Army and Emergency Response Brigade forces from Ramadi on December 31.⁸ Entering Ramadi from multiple directions on January 1, 2014, ISIL fighters opportunistically exploited the breakdown of government control to ransack police stations in the city.⁹

The dynamic was markedly different in Falluja where (even before the crisis) Iraqi Army forces were normally only located on the outer edges of the city. From the night of December 30, armed locals also came to the streets, massing at the main Falluja protest site (on the highway east of the urban center), appearing to answer earlier calls by `Abd al-Malik al-Sa`di and Grand Mufti Sheikh Rafi` al-Rifa`i to block the road to prevent reinforcements from reaching Ramadi and western Anbar.¹⁰ Local residents also fortified the entry checkpoints to the city to exclude Iraqi government forces from entering Falluja.¹¹ After some days of inconclusive skirmishing around the edges of Falluja city, Iraqi government forces settled down for a prolonged siege. Inside the city, ISIL convoys paraded in Falluja's streets, ransacking local police stations and using megaphones to call on residents to repent and pledge allegiance.¹² The ISIL unilaterally declared Falluja an Islamic state at Friday prayers on January 3, 2014.¹³

tors at the Hawija protest site near Kirkuk. On March 23, 2014, Shi'a SWAT killed a further 27 civilians at Buhriz, Diyala Province. See Wladimir van Wilgenburg, "Implications of the Hawija 'Massacre' and Kirkuk Protest Movement," *Today's Zaman*, May 12, 2013. Also see Ghaith `Abdul-Ahad, "Iraq Election Holds Little Hope of Change for Town Scarred by Decade of War," *Guardian*, April 29, 2014.

8 Personal interview, Iraqi National Intelligence Service official, May 9, 2014.

9 "Anbar: The Road to Catastrophe," *Inside Iraqi Politics*, January 8, 2014, p. 6.

10 "Baghdad Adrift as Deadlock Continues," *Inside Iraqi Politics*, March 6, 2014, p. 3.

11 The International Crisis Group's well-sourced account described non-ISIL groups of armed residents taking control of the entry checkpoints. See "Falluja's Faustian Bargain," International Crisis Group, April 28, 2014, p. 13, fn 32.

12 Ahmed Ali, "Iraq Update #42: Al-Qaeda in Iraq Patrols in Fallujah," Institute for the Study of War, January 5, 2014.

13 Ibid.

The ISIL in Ramadi

In Ramadi, the provincial government and key tribal groupings were loosely aligned with the government against the ISIL until the government arrest and military operations of December 28-30, 2013. Almost immediately after the late December clashes, the government and most of Ramadi's tribes once again made common cause against the ISIL, seemingly in reaction to the ISIL's alarming expansion into Ramadi city neighborhoods.¹⁴ The ISIL's northern effort failed in January 2014. The ISIL fighters from the Western Euphrates River Valley towns and the Western Desert reinforced the ISIL in the rural areas north of Ramadi such as Abu Sha`ban and `Ali Jassim, and to the `Alwan and Abu Fahad tribal areas to the northeast of Ramadi.¹⁵ By the end of January, locally-recruited police paramilitaries, tribal fighters and the military pacified the urban areas of Ramadi north of the Euphrates collectively known as Abu Faraj or Jazira.¹⁶

The situation in southern Ramadi evolved very differently, with the ISIL mounting a costly multi-month effort to dominate the southern neighborhoods of al-Mal`ab, Fursan, Hayy al-Dhubat

14 This is hardly surprising: key Ramadi tribal leaders such as Shaykh Ahmad al-Rishawi (Ahmad Abu Risha) risked everything to defeat the terrorist movement in Ramadi in 2006-2007. The return of the ISIL to Ramadi's streets is inimical to almost all of Ramadi's shaykhs. Key provincial leaders including Governor Ahmad Khalaf al-Dhiyabi and Provincial Council Chairman Sabah al-Halbusi worked to rapidly soothe tensions between the Iraqi government and most of the local tribes, excepting elements of Ahmad al-`Alwan's clan and Shaykh `Ali Hatem Sulayman's Military Command of Anbar Tribal Revolutionaries—both marginal military forces. See "Falluja's Faustian Bargain," p. 13, fn 29; "Anbar: Security Forces Fight Insurgency to a Standstill," *Inside Iraqi Politics*, April 19, 2014, pp. 7-8.

15 Personal interview, Aymenn al-Tamimi, May 12, 2014.

16 Jazira, a block of neighborhoods north of the Euphrates and south of Highway 11, is not to be confused with the desert area of the same name abutting Syria. The westerly Jazira and easterly Aetha areas make up the Abu Faraj area of Ramadi, which includes Ramadi's protest site on Highway 11. During 2013, this area usually suffered 3-4 attacks per month according to The Washington Institute's Iraq violence database. With the exception of a spike of 24 attacks in January 2014, the average returned to four attacks per month in February-April 2014.

and al-Hawz.¹⁷ This effort was launched from al-Humayra and Albu Jabr, a belt of rural suburbs south of the train line that marks Ramadi city's southern edge. The area is physically linked to similar ISIL "support zones" south of Falluja and stretching down to the Jurf as-Sakhar area in northern Babil Province. The ISIL has been strident in its defense of its southern launch-

“The ISIL may have overreached by committing itself to the defense of terrain, particularly in urban areas so close to the Iraqi government’s logistical bases around Baghdad.”

pads. In al-Humayra, for example, an Iraqi Army probe was decimated on April 20, 2014, by wire-guided anti-tank missiles, with the loss of an entire mixed platoon of T-62 tanks and MTLB armored vehicles.¹⁸ ISIL forces have used titanium-coated, armor-piercing ammunition in Dragonov-model rifles to shoot out the engine blocks on large numbers of Iraqi Hummers in an apparent effort to reduce Iraqi Security Force (ISF) mobility.¹⁹ When security forces began searches for ISIL workshops in late March 2014, a car bomb damaged the bridge linking Ramadi city to the al-Ta`mim suburb, the historic site for ISIL bombmaking workshops in Ramadi.²⁰

17 A useful Radio Free Iraq tracker for Ramadi incidents can be found at www.anbardaily.blogspot.com.

18 Personal interview, Omar Nidawi, Iraq analyst, Washington, D.C., May 21, 2014. See the useful stream of Tweeted imagery and updates from @MemlikPasha, "#ISIS ambushed a large ISF armored column in the al-Humayra area in the southeastern outskirts of Ar Ramadi," April 21, 2014, available at www.twitsy.com/i/7pun9e#1pISWIZCp6MaRPzW.99.

19 Personal interview, U.S. government official, May 20, 2014.

20 Personal interview, Iraqi National Security Advisory official, May 6, 2014. AQI historically hid car bomb workshops in the mechanics areas of al-Ta`mim, an industrial and worker suburb on the west side of the canal, southwest of the city. The ISIL appears to use the same area for car bomb fabrication today. Before the current

The determination of the ISIL's efforts to destabilize southern Ramadi are quite exceptional, even by the violent standards of today's Iraq. Prior to the late summer of 2013, the ISIL conducted around eight to ten attacks per month in Ramadi's urban center south of the Euphrates.²¹ This increased to an average of 20 attacks per month from September-December 2013, reflecting an intensification of attacks on police forces and tribal leaders.²² From January-April 2014, the average number of monthly attacks surged to 44 in the southern Ramadi neighborhoods.²³ The destructiveness of the attacks also increased, causing significant material damage and major outflows of internally displaced persons. In 2013, there was an average of one attempted mass casualty attack in Ramadi per month: in the first four months of 2014, the monthly average increased to 9.25.²⁴ In April 2014, the ISIL launched 13 attempted suicide vest attacks and six attempted suicide car bombings in southern Ramadi.²⁵

The ISIL has invested significant numbers of suicide militants to keep the fight active in Ramadi,²⁶ despite the low probability that the ISIL will eventually control the city. Ramadi city was the heart of the tribal "awakening" in Iraq and the ISIL appears determined to keep fighting in this area. It has succeeded, in so far as ongoing violence is a distraction to the government and prolongs the sense that the city is contested. Yet Ramadi is essentially under government control, albeit with a significant "commuter insurgency"²⁷

crisis, Iraqi security forces discovered a car bomb factory in al-Ta'mim on September 1, 2013, that contained three tons of ammonium nitrate, 50 kilograms of C4 and large stores of specialized equipment to make car bombs.

²¹ These figures are derived from The Washington Institute's Iraq violence dataset.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid. The ISIL used such weapons to try to penetrate the Anbar Operations Center and the compound of Shaykh Ahmed Abu Risha. In another case, a captured Iraqi Army Hummer was used to conceal a car bomb.

²⁶ Of 34 attempted suicide attacks in eastern Anbar in January-April 2014, 25 were in Ramadi city, according to The Washington Institute's Iraq violence dataset.

²⁷ The "commuter insurgency" refers to an urban fight in which insurgents travel in each day, like suburban commuters, from support zones on the outskirts. Coined

still able to penetrate the city's southern flank and repeatedly draw the government into destructive clearance operations. This is arguably a limited payoff for a significant investment of ISIL effort and presumably considerable losses as well. If the ISIL downgrades its effort or loses its southern Ramadi support zone, the government and its tribal allies may be able to claim a partial victory.

The ISIL's Stand in Falluja

The background to the ISIL's creeping takeover of Falluja is rooted in the city's isolated status within Anbar Province. Falluja is an insular town renowned for its rebelliousness and links to Salafism.²⁸ The tribal uprising that gathered momentum in Ramadi never achieved the same result in Falluja, and al-Qa'ida affiliates have enjoyed far greater ongoing freedom of movement in Falluja, including at the city's protest camps.²⁹ Throughout 2013, the ISIL sought to expand its profile inside Falluja city. Militant attacks claimed by the ISIL in Falluja city rose from an average of 16 per month in the first quarter of 2013 to 31 in the last quarter of that year, with an apex of 39 incidents in December 2013.³⁰ The ISIL's preferred tactics in Falluja throughout the year were drive-by shootings, under-vehicle bombings and car bombings of houses belonging to local leaders and police forces. The ISIL also targeted electrical generator operators, shopkeepers and clerics in a slow-building campaign of fundraising and influence-building.³¹

Throughout 2013, the ISIL also strengthened its hold on the southern neighborhoods and southern rural outskirts of Falluja city. The Euphrates River communities south of Falluja

by U.S. forces in Iraq, the concept is explained further in David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 142.

²⁸ For discussions of Falluja's reputation for rebellion and piety, see John R. Ballard, *Fighting for Fallujah: A New Dawn for Iraq* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006), pp. 2-5. Also see "Falluja: Embattled City of Mosques and Minarets," BBC, January 9, 2014.

²⁹ Marisa Sullivan, Stephen Wicken, and Sam Wyer, "Iraq Update 2013 #4, Fallujah Protests Turn Violent," Institute for the Study of War, January 25, 2013.

³⁰ All insights in this paragraph are drawn from The Washington Institute's Iraq violence dataset.

³¹ Ibid.

such as al-N`imiya and `Amiriy were important AQI support zones in 2006 until the local Albu `Issa tribes sought U.S. support to break al-Qa'ida's stranglehold.³² Since then, the ISIL has gradually clawed its way back into these areas. An ISIL suicide bomber killed the key anti-ISIL tribal leader, Shaykh `Aifan al-`Issawi, in January 2013.³³ The consolidation in 2013 of the ISIL's "Wilayat al-Janub" in the Jurf as-Sakhar area of northern Babil has placed another contiguous support zone to the southeast.³⁴ By October 19, 2013, the ISIL was confident enough to hold a 50 vehicle rally in daylight in the southern Falluja mechanics area of al-Shuhada', a historical car bomb manufacturing hub.³⁵ An ISIL sniper killed Falluja's mayor, `Adnan Hussein al-Dulaymi, in al-Shuhada' on November 13, 2013.³⁶

One of the most interesting aspects of the Falluja stand-off in 2014 has been the state of relations between the ISIL and other insurgent factions within the city.³⁷ On the surface, the groups have cooperated, with non-ISIL forces manning many of the city's perimeter defenses and with the ISIL providing military support and advice. The relationship, however, is more complex: Fallujans never rejected al-Qa'ida and its spin-offs to the extent that Ramadi's tribes did. Even so, memories of the

³² For a detailed account of this period and these geographies, see Bill Ardolino, *Fallujah Awakens: Marines, Sheikhs, and the Battle Against al Qaeda* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2013). Also see Montgomery and McWilliams eds., pp. 84-105.

³³ Bill Ardolino, "Al Qaeda Claims Assassination of MP Aifan Sadoun," *The Long War Journal*, January 20, 2013.

³⁴ Personal interview, Aymenn al-Tamimi, May 12, 2014.

³⁵ Personal interview, Iraqi National Security Advisory official, May 6, 2014.

³⁶ "Fallujah Mayor Assassinated While Anbar Council Tries To Replace Provincial Police Chief," Musings on Iraq blog, November 14, 2013.

³⁷ This relationship is explored in some depth throughout "Falluja's Faustian Bargain." Among a dizzying array of resurrected nationalist and Salafist insurgent factions in Falluja's military council, the key non-ISIL group appears to be Hamas al-Iraq. All others appear to have limited military clout in Falluja. Further insight into the tactical formation of non-ISIL company-sized militias within Falluja is given in Matt Bradley and Ali Nabhan, "Iraqi Officer Takes Dark Turn to al Qaeda: Alliance Against Maliki Government Develops After Armed Militants Overtook Fallujah," *Wall Street Journal*, March 19, 2014.

destruction that al-Qa`ida brought upon the city in 2004 are still fresh. There is also considerable bitterness between former AQI fighters and Fallujans who cooperated with the government, notably tribal groups like the Albu`Issa and the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) with its militant wing in Falluja, Hamas al-Iraq.³⁸ Initially, the ISIL struck a

“If the government can pacify Ramadi and Falluja, particularly with local tribes in the lead, then the ISIL could experience a very public strategic setback.”

conciliatory note, promising not to attack the locally-recruited police forces and merely chiding Fallujans for backing the government against AQI from 2007 onwards.³⁹ Very quickly, however, the ISIL escalated its contest with the IIP and Hamas al-Iraq. In early January 2014, most of the Falluja police force ceased wearing uniforms and police stations associated with former Hamas al-Iraq members were abandoned to ISIL looting.⁴⁰ From January 3 onwards, ISIL patrols cruised Falluja city in captured police vehicles using megaphones to call policemen to repent.⁴¹ The ISIL reacted aggressively when the Iraqi government and Ramadi shaykhs negotiated the appointment of

38 One example of the blood feud between the ISIL and local shaykhs was the aforementioned revenge assassination of Shaykh `Aifan al-`Issawi, which came over seven years after he turned on AQI. In January 2014, Shaykh Abu Mohammed al-Adnani, the ISIL's spokesman, claimed that the ISIL would “award whoever takes the head of the traitor, Ahmed Abu Risha.” See Ahmed Ali, “Iraq Update #5: ‘The Time to Harvest is Coming’ – ISIS Statement,” Institute for the Study of War, January 8, 2014.

39 Since the start of 2014, the ISIL has pushed the message in Falluja that “we warned you when you joined the Sahwa and it turned out just as we predicted. So join us in making a Sunni region.” See personal interview, Jaber al-Jaberi, Iraqi MP and Falluja negotiator, Baghdad, March 11, 2014.

40 Ahmed Ali, “Iraq Update #42: Al-Qaeda in Iraq Patrols in Fallujah,” Institute for the Study of War, January 5, 2014.

41 Ibid.

a new mayor and police chief for Falluja on January 12:⁴² throughout the latter half of January, the ISIL detained and harassed the new mayor, damaged the mayor's office with multiple improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and bombed the new police chief's home.⁴³

Although the ISIL agreed not to hold rallies or try to govern the city when it joined the Falluja Military Council⁴⁴ on February 8, 2014, the movement has consistently overstepped the reported restrictions placed upon it by other Fallujan rebels.⁴⁵ For example, on March 20, the ISIL held a major rally in Falluja's government center that included ISIL flags carried on captured police vehicles and Iraqi Army Hummers.⁴⁶ In the April 24-30 period, the ISIL undertook house demolitions against the Falluja homes of three Anbar provincial council members and one member of parliament.⁴⁷ National elections proved impossible to hold in Falluja on April 30.⁴⁸ The ISIL has also sought to take over distribution of critical supplies including food and cooking gas bottles.⁴⁹ At the start of May, the Falluja Military Council publicly complained that the ISIL was disarming rival militias inside Falluja rather than focusing fully on the defense of the city against the common enemy, the Iraqi

42 The Ramadi-based provincial council sought to appoint Mohammed `Allawi al-`Issawi, a cousin of Ahmed Abu Risha, as the new police chief for Falluja. See “Falluja's Faustian Bargain,” p. 13.

43 “Falluja Mayor Assassinated,” Musings on Iraq blog, November 14, 2013.

44 “Anbar: Disunity Undermines Fight Against Insurgency,” *Inside Iraqi Politics*, February 18, 2014, p. 4. *Inside Iraqi Politics* lists the factions as “ISIS and eight other groups: al-Jaysh al-Islami, Jaysh Muhammad Brigades, Jaysh al-Murabitin, Asad-Allah al-Ghalib Brigades, Hamas al-Iraq, Faylaq Omar, Falluja Revolutionaries, and Sons of Fallujah. The council, which meets twice a week, has 15 members, some of whom are dignitaries or religious scholars rather than militia leaders.”

45 According to “Falluja's Faustian Bargain,” p. 15, the ISIL was “forbidden from imposing their views and promoting the imposition of Sharia (Islamic law), from targeting state officials or former sahwa members as well as their properties, and from raising al-Qaeda flags.”

46 All insights in this paragraph are drawn from The Washington Institute's Iraq violence dataset.

47 “Security In Iraq 2 Weeks Before National Elections,” Musings on Iraq blog, April 17, 2014.

48 Ibid.

49 Personal interview, Aymenn al-Tamimi, May 12, 2014.

government.⁵⁰ The tone of the council's complaints indicates that the ISIL is increasingly in charge within Falluja.⁵¹

The federal government was initially willing to contain the ISIL within Falluja rather than risk a political and military setback during the electoral and government formation processes. This option has been undermined by the porous cordon around Falluja city and by the ISIL's determination to launch strategic high-impact attacks toward Baghdad.

One theme touted by the ISIL has been a renewed battle of Baghdad, a city where the Sunni minority and its militias were roundly defeated and purged in many areas by Shi'a militias in 2006-2007. On January 19, 2014, ISIL *amir* Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi urged fighters to “creep toward Baghdad,”⁵² a call that was later echoed on April 12 in a communiqué to slip “as soft as fog” into Baghdad.⁵³ With surprising mobility, the ISIL appears to have moved forces from its Ramadi-Falluja corridor and the shores of Lake Tharthar to Baghdad's outskirts via Saqlawiya, Karma and Abu Ghurayb.⁵⁴ On March 31, the ISIL held a large parade in an outer suburb of Abu Ghurayb comprising between 70-100 vehicles, including Iraqi Army Hummers and even an M113 tracked armored personnel carrier.⁵⁵ On April 9, the U.S. government warned about a threat to Baghdad International Airport, adjacent to Abu Ghurayb.⁵⁶

50 The Falluja Military Council accused the ISIL of “attacking the Council and factions stationed on the frontlines including the kidnapping of a large number of them and confiscation of their weapons.” See “Fallujah, The Military Council' calls 'Daash' to Stop his Actions,” Shafaq News, May 2, 2014.

51 The author would like to thank the Institute for the Study of War team led by Ahmed Ali for its provision of data on ISIL-military council disputes in late April and early May 2014.

52 “ISIL Chief Urges Fighters to ‘Creep Toward Baghdad,’” *Daily Star*, January 19, 2014.

53 See tweeted data on this issue from journalist @Danieleraineri at <http://pic.twitter.com/JqJcdrtS4U>.

54 Personal interview, Aymenn al-Tamimi, May 12, 2014.

55 Bill Roggio, “ISIS Parades on Outskirts of Baghdad,” *The Long War Journal*, April 1, 2014.

56 “Emergency Message for the U.S. Community in Iraq: Heightened Risk of Violence on and Around 9 April,” U.S. Embassy Baghdad, April 8, 2014.

Using a different approach, the ISIL also manipulated its on-off control of the regulating dams downstream of Falluja to flood the Euphrates delta from April 6 onwards, causing extensive displacement of rural residents and threatening to flood metropolitan Baghdad.⁵⁷ These gambits, alongside the well-publicized execution of Iraqi special forces, appear to have been designed to lure the Iraqi military into a hasty assault on Falluja, a potential spark for a wider Sunni Arab uprising against the government.⁵⁸ With Iraqi forces tightening the siege and clearing Falluja's rural outskirts on all sides during May 2014, the ISIL may have succeeded in speeding up the government's plans for Falluja.

Conclusion

The ISIL, and its predecessor the ISI, has been remarkably successful in recovering its position in Iraq since 2011,⁵⁹ yet the movement's Iraqi successes cannot yet compare to its development of a secure capital city in al-Raqqa, Syria. Iraq is still a financial powerhouse for the ISIL, particularly its third-largest city, Mosul, but the ISIL's political center of gravity is undoubtedly in Syria. The ISIL's ambitions in the Ramadi-Falluja corridor represent a potential shift in this dynamic, with the movement seeking to establish long-term control over liberated zones at the heart of Iraq. If successful, the development of a defensible ISIL caliphate just outside Baghdad would be a historic achievement on par with anything the movement has achieved in Syria. Such success would be doubly sweet, taking place on iconic terrain where the ISIL's predecessors experienced great success

in 2004 and crushing defeat in 2006-2007.⁶⁰

This intoxicating vision comes with a warning: the ISIL has now committed itself to a battle for terrain, and the fight is taking place at a point where the Iraqi military can easily concentrate and supply its forces and where local allies may be willing to enable the government's offensive. At the present time, there are reportedly 13 Iraqi military brigades with extensive artillery and air support deployed in the Ramadi-Falluja corridor.⁶¹ Baghdad International Airport provides a secure resupply route for the significant U.S. military aid being provided to Iraq's forces. The ISIL may have placed itself on an anvil. If the hammer falls and the government mismanages its offensive, causing significant civilian casualties or failing to evict the ISIL, the militant group will score an important victory. Yet the ISIL now faces the same strategic puzzle as forerunners such as AQI: it needs to either control territory or it may begin to fade away in the face of local pushback. If the government can pacify Ramadi and Falluja, particularly with local tribes in the lead, then the ISIL could experience a very public strategic setback. For the ISIL project in Iraq, the Ramadi-Falluja conflict could be a fulcrum point.

Dr. Michael Knights is the Lafer Fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He has worked in all of Iraq's provinces, including periods embedded with the Iraqi security forces. He recently provided Congressional testimony on the resurgence of Al-Qa`ida in Iraq in December 2013 and has written on militancy in Iraq for the CTC Sentinel since 2008.

57 "Iraq Insurgents Turn Seized Dam into Weapon," *Daily Star*, April 12, 2014.

58 On January 20, 2014, the ISIL video-recorded the executions of four captured Iraqi SWAT soldiers near Ramadi. See "Execution of SWAT Forces Furthers Crimes Against Humanity," Human Rights Watch, February 5, 2014. In 2004, the first assault on Falluja was prompted by the ambush, slaying and public dismemberment of Blackwater private security guards in the city. The ISIL may have been seeking an echo of this scenario, which ended with a propaganda victory for AQI when the hasty offensive was suspended.

59 For an early review of the ISI's recovery in Iraq from 2011 onwards, see Michael Knights, "Back with a Vengeance: Al-Qaeda in Iraq Rebounds," IHS Defense, Security & Risk Consulting, February 24, 2012.

60 ISIL spokesman Abu Muhammad al-`Adnani made a statement on Falluja in April 2014 in which he claimed: "We have returned to the cities, and controlled the ground, and we will be killed a thousand times before we think of going back. In the cities and provinces that are under our control, on top of them Falluja...there will be no place in it for the secularists. For Falluja is Falluja of the Mujahidin and Anbar is Anbar of the Mujahidin." See Memlik Pasha, "ISIS Insurgents Have Almost Surrounded Baghdad," *Vice*, April 29, 2014.

61 See DJ Elliot, "Iraq Order of Battle," Montrose Toast blog, available at www.home.comcast.net/~djyae/site/?/page/Iraq_Order_of_Battle.

Kidnappings and Murders Targeting Foreigners in Libya

By Alison Pargeter

KIDNAPPINGS AND MURDERS have become common in post-Qadhafi Libya. Eastern Libya has suffered the worst, with an ongoing assassination campaign that has killed scores of security personnel and members of the judiciary in drive-by shootings and bomb attacks, especially in the towns of Benghazi and Derna. The country has also witnessed hundreds of kidnappings and abductions since the fall of the former regime. An armed group even seized and detained former Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zidan in October 2013.¹ These murders and kidnappings have become part and parcel of the chaos that has enveloped the country since the fall of the former regime in 2011.

Alongside these attacks, however, there has been a growing number of kidnappings and murders of foreigners. These incidents do not appear to be connected. No single group has claimed responsibility for either the killings or abductions, and the motives appear to be as varied as the incidents themselves. While some of the attacks are clearly politically or ideologically driven, others seem simply to be opportunistic attempts by criminal groups seeking financial gain. Due to its ongoing weakness and the collapse of the central authorities that accompanied the fall of the former regime, the Libyan state is still beholden to the array of militias, revolutionary brigades, and armed groups that control the ground. As a result, the state has been unable to counter the entrenchment of militant Islamist groups, especially in the east. As Culture Minister Habib al-Ameen argued in early March 2014, extremists are getting the upper hand in Benghazi, which is now comprised of "armed cantons," each controlled by certain currents or groups.²

1 "Libyan PM Ali Zeidan Detained by Militia," BBC, October 10, 2013.

2 "Mesoul Libi Rafia Yatarif Lil Mara Oula Biwujoud Al-Takfreen fi Benghazi," *al-Quds al-Arabi*, March 2, 2014.

This article examines some of the kidnappings and murders of foreigners that have occurred in Libya during recent months. It finds that although not part of an organized or unified strategy, these incidents represent a new trend that is indicative of the generalized chaos that has gripped the country since the revolution, as well as further evidence of the entrenchment of militant Islamist groups.

Kidnapping of Foreigners: Political Motives

Assailants have kidnapped a number of foreigners in Libya in recent months. Notably, they have kidnapped diplomatic personnel who have clearly been seized with the aim of achieving specific political goals, namely the release of Libyans detained abroad.

On April 15, 2014, masked gunmen kidnapped the Jordanian ambassador, Fawaz al-Itan, from the center of Tripoli as he was on his way to work. Not long after he was seized, his abductors, whose identities are still unknown, demanded that Jordanian authorities release Libyan militant Mohamed Said Dersi, known as al-Nass, who was sentenced to life imprisonment in Jordan in 2007 for plotting to blow up a Jordanian airport.³ Dersi, who is from the Islamist stronghold of al-Laithi in Benghazi, is a former member of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) and was arrested in April 2006 in Jordan along with two Iraqis.⁴ The Jordanian authorities accused him of being part of al-Qa`ida.

According to Libyan sources quoted in an article by Libyan journalist Omar al-Keddie and published on the Bawabat al-Wasat website, Dersi's family and tribe had been pushing Amman to grant him clemency.⁵ Frustrated at their lack of progress, the family allegedly turned to revolutionary elements in the capital who carried

out the kidnapping on their behalf.⁶ The veracity of these reports is not clear. Al-Itan's abductors demanded Dersi's release and appealed to Jordan to stop torturing Islamist prisoners in Jordanian prisons and to free a number of detainees.⁷

The abductors' actions paid off. After a period of intense negotiations between Amman and Tripoli, Dersi was handed over to Libya on May 13 in return for al-Itan's release on the same day. Dersi was supposed to receive a reduction in his sentence and be allowed to serve the remainder of his prison time in Libya.⁸ Once back on Libyan soil, however, Dersi was allowed to go free. It seems as though his kidnappers struck a hard bargain: Dersi was met at Tripoli airport by his brother, who accompanied him home to Benghazi, telling the media the following day: "My brother is free and he resides in the family home in Benghazi and he is not in a Libyan prison."⁹

In a similar vein, two Tunisian diplomats were kidnapped around the same time by a group with specific political motivations. On March 21, secretary of the Tunisian embassy, Mohamed Ben Sheikh, was abducted from his car in the Ain Zara area of the capital, forced into his abductors' vehicle and driven away.¹⁰ A few weeks later on April 17, Laroussi Gantassi, an adviser at the Tunisian embassy, was seized from Tripoli's al-Kadasia Square.¹¹ According to reports in the Tunisian media, Gantassi may not have been the intended target of the abduction.¹² These reports claim that he had intervened to save two Tunisian engineers who had been detained at a security checkpoint.¹³ This has not been confirmed,

6 Ibid.

7 "Menji Hamadi: Al-diplmasi Tunisi Laroussi Gantassi Maktouf Min Jama`a Tutaleb Beitaq Serah Libyeen Min Sijoun Tunis," al-Sada Press, undated.

8 "Libya: Al-Urdon Sertusalim Sajeenan Islamiyan Mukabel Al-Ifrage An-Safirih Al-Mukhtataf," *Libya al-Mostakbal*, April 29, 2014.

9 "Libya Focus," Menas Associates, May 2014.

10 "Tunisia Diplomat Kidnapped in Libya," Press TV [Tehran], March 23, 2014.

11 "Khash: Al-Tafaseel Al-Kamela Li Amaliyat Ikhtitaf Al-Diplmasi Laroussi Gantassi Bi Libya," *Elbasade*, April 26, 2014.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

however. The diplomats' abductors, who appeared to be from the same group that kidnapped Ben Sheikh, later demanded the release of two Libyan prisoners who were sentenced to 20 years in prison in Tunisia for taking part in a May 2011 gun battle between militants and security forces that killed two Tunisian soldiers at Rouhia.¹⁴ Then, on April 21, a poorly produced video appeared on social media sites showing a sobbing Ben Sheikh appealing to Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki to talk to his captors to secure his release.¹⁵

The video was made by Shabab al-Tawhid Lil A`alam (the Young Monotheists' Media), which, according to Tunisian jihadist sources, is one of the media arms of Ansar al-Shari`a in Tunisia.¹⁶ At the end of the video, text appeared on the screen threatening, "As you imprison ours, we imprison yours. As you kill ours, we kill yours."¹⁷

The kidnappings seem to have been some sort of collaboration between Libyan and Tunisian militants. A Tunisian jihadist who resides in Libya told the media that the abductions were a joint operation undertaken by Libyan jihadist elements who are part of Ansar al-Shari`a and Tunisian elements that belong to the same organization in Tunisia but who have been residing in Libya since August 2013.¹⁸ Little is known about the extent of collaboration between Ansar al-Shari`a in Libya and Tunisia. Tunisian militants, however, have certainly joined Ansar al-Shari`a run training camps that are preparing volunteers to fight in Syria.¹⁹

14 "Al-Kadha Al-Tunisi Yestima Lilibeen Itha Ikhtitaf Tuniseen Fi Tarabulsi," *Elaph*, April 23, 2014.

15 "Libyan Jihadist Group Parades Sobbing Hostage," al-Arabiya, April 21, 2014.

16 "Amaliat Ikhtitaf Al-Diplomasi Tunisi Nafedhaha Muntamoun Li Ansar Al-Sharia Fi Tunis," *al-Jarida*, April 22, 2014. This group should not be confused with the Libyan Shabab al-Tawhid group, which is a separate entity, and which did not post the video on its Facebook page.

17 "Tunisian Diplomat, in Video Message, Urges Government to Negotiate with Libyan Kidnappers," Reuters, April 21, 2014.

18 "Khash: Majmua Jihadiya Tunisia-Libeeya Takif Wara Ikhtitaf Al-Diplomasi Al-Tunisi," *Afrigate News*, April 21, 2014.

19 Aaron Zelin, "New Evidence on Ansar al-Sharia in Libya Training Camps," al-Wasat blog, August 8, 2013.

3 "Jordanian Ambassador's Kidnappers Seek Libyan Militant's Release," *Asharq al-Awsat*, April 16, 2014.

4 "Al-Urdon Sefruj An Al-Dersi Muqabel Safirahu Bi Libya," al-Jazira, April 22, 2014.

5 "Omar Al-Keddie: Awaqib Ikhtitaf Al-Safir Al-Urdani Ala Libya," Bawabat al-Wasat, April 17, 2014. Bawabat al-Wasat is a relatively new venture established and headed by former head of media in the executive office of the Transitional National Council (NTC), Mahmoud Shamam. It is based in Cairo and is generally considered to be liberal in orientation.

Why these elements chose only to demand the release of Libyan militants rather than both Libyan and Tunisian militants is not clear.

The abductions, however, sparked a rush of negotiations that included mediation from former LIFG *amir* and head of the al-Watan party, Abdelhakim Belhadj. On April 26, Bensheikh's sister, Samira Bensheikh, divulged that she had received a call from one of the leaders of the al-Watan party, Jamal Sadawi, who resides in Tunisia and who reassured her that Belhadj was making every effort to secure her brother's release.²⁰ The abductors, however, reportedly refused to continue negotiations with other involved parties until Belhadj was removed from the talks.²¹

The identities of the other parties are not clear. On April 28, Acting Libyan Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thinni told the media that his government was communicating with the kidnapers of both the Tunisians and the Jordanian ambassador al-Itan, asserting, "We do not want to use force against the kidnapers, we want to reach peaceful solutions."²² As a result, it appears likely that those holding the Tunisians hostage will achieve their demands.

This is not the first time in post-Qadhafi Libya that abducting foreign diplomatic personnel resulted in the realization of a specific political demand. In January 2014, five Egyptian diplomats were kidnapped from their Tripoli homes. Their abductors demanded that Egypt free revolutionary commander Hadia Shaban (also known as Abu Obeida Zawi), who had been arrested in Alexandria in January.²³ Shaban, a hard line Salafist, spent 10 years in Yemen from 1993 where he was known for his militant preaching.²⁴ He is the commander of the Libyan Revolutionary Operations Chamber (LROC), the body

accused of kidnapping Prime Minister Ali Zidan and which answers directly to the General National Congress (GNC). The LROC is deemed to be particularly close to GNC head Nouri Abu Sahmaine, who in the summer of 2013 appointed Shaban to head up the LROC and tasked it with securing Tripoli.²⁵ Although the LROC denied any involvement in the kidnapping of the Egyptian diplomats, it was not shy in making it clear that it would not tolerate Shaban's imprisonment. Adel Ghariani of the LROC threatened that the Egyptians would face a "strong response" if Shaban was not released.²⁶

It is still not entirely clear why the Egyptian authorities detained Shaban. On January 26, *al-Sharq al-Awsat* quoted Egyptian security sources who claimed that Shaban had been in contact with members of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and that he intended to carry out "acts of terror" on the third anniversary of the Egyptian revolution.²⁷ The Egyptian Interior Ministry, however, maintained that the commander had been arrested because his residency had expired.²⁸

Despite denials of a "deal," both Shaban and the Egyptian diplomats were released at the end of January following negotiations between the Libyan and Egyptian governments.²⁹ No one was arrested or held accountable for the incident, sending out a clear signal that one's political goals could be achieved by seizing foreign diplomatic personnel. Indeed, Libya has developed a culture of impunity in which such crimes go unpunished. Even those who kidnapped former Prime Minister Zidan have not been held accountable.

Other Kidnapping Motives

Other foreigners have also been targeted in kidnap operations during recent months, although in these cases the perpetrators remain unknown and the motivations are far less clear. Although it is impossible to be certain, these appear to be largely opportunistic attempts with the primary aim of securing financial gain.

This would certainly seem to be the case with the kidnappings of three Italians in the east of the country. On March 22, Italian construction company employee Gianluca Salviato was seized near Tobruk.³⁰ Salviato's car was discovered with the keys still in the ignition after he failed to show up for work on the site of a new sewer project in the al-Hadaek area of the town.³¹ Since Salviato's kidnapping, there has been no ransom demand, or at least not one that has been made public, and no news of his whereabouts.

Salviato's kidnapping came just weeks after the release of two Italians, Francesco Scalise and Luciano Gallo. The two contractors, who worked for an engineering firm, were kidnapped in January in the village of Martouba on the road between Derna and Tobruk.³² Little is known about their abduction and the circumstances surrounding their release. The fact that they were freed, however, suggests that they may have been taken by a criminal gang seeking financial gain, rather than by a group with more ideological motives. The same appears to be true of Salviato's kidnapping. An Italian Foreign Ministry spokesman stated following his abduction that they believed Salviato had been seized by a "criminal organization intending to seek a ransom, rather than an Islamist group."³³

On January 20, South Korean Han Seok-Woo, who headed the Libya office of the Korean Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA), was abducted in Tripoli on his way home

20 "Belhaj Utamin Shakiqa Al-Diplomasi Al-Tunisi Al-Muqtataf," *Bawabat al-Wasat*, April 26, 2014.

21 Alikhbaria, April 26, 2014.

22 "Kidnapped Diplomats in Good Health Says Al-Thinni," *Libya Herald*, April 28, 2014.

23 The abductors appeared on the al-Arabiya channel on January 25, 2014, demanding Hadia be released within 24 hours. See "Libya Says Five Kidnapped Egyptian Diplomats Freed," Reuters, January 26, 2014.

24 "Libya: Militias, Politicians Meld in Explosive Mix," Associated Press, October 22, 2013.

25 "Ghorfat Amaliat Thuwar Libya Wa Lajnat Mukafat Al-Jarima...Qiyanat Ghamdht Fi Dawla Al-Libyeya," *Asharq al-Awsat*, October 11, 2013.

26 "Libya Politics and Security," Menas Associates, January 27, 2014.

27 "Masader Amnia: Al-Ishtiba Bintima Qa'id Thuwar Libya Lil Qa'ida Wa Tawasal Ma Al-Ikhwan Fil Qahira," *Asharq al-Awsat*, January 26, 2014.

28 "Libyan Militiaman Released in Egypt after Diplomats Freed," Reuters, January 27, 2014.

29 "Kidnapped Egyptian Diplomats in Libya Freed," al-Jazeera, January 27, 2014.

30 "Gianluca Salviato rapito in Libia: 'Un mese senza notizie,'" *La Nuova Di Venezia e Mestre*, April 19, 2014.

31 Ibid.

32 "Paura in Cirenaica rapiti due operai italiani," *L'Unita*, January 19, 2014.

33 "Italy Says its Citizen Kidnapped in Libya, Needs Medical Help," Reuters, March 23, 2014.

from work. He was dragged from his car by four gunmen who forced him in their vehicle before driving away, leaving his Iraqi driver behind.³⁴

Libyan security forces freed Seok-Woo three days later and arrested his abductors. According to a spokesman from Libya's Foreign Ministry, the South Korean was freed by security forces with the cooperation of citizens in the neighborhood where he was detained. The spokesman stated, "The people who kidnapped him were not ideologically or politically motivated. Some of the kidnappers were arrested."³⁵ Therefore, his abduction appears to have been another opportunistic kidnapping by a group trying to take advantage of the pervading lawlessness, possibly for financial gain.

Murders of Foreigners

Foreigners have also been targeted in fatal attacks during recent months, mostly in the troubled east. On March 2, 2014, French engineer Patrice Real was shot dead in his car by unidentified gunmen in the Ras Obraida area of Benghazi.³⁶ Real had been working on a project to upgrade and expand the Benghazi Medical Center. Little is known about the circumstances surrounding his death or who was behind it.

The same is true of the killing of British oil worker Mark de Salis and his New Zealand companion, Lynn Howie, on January 1, 2014. They were shot dead as they picnicked on a beach near Mellitah in the west of the country. Both were shot in the head in what was clearly an execution-style attack.³⁷ A photograph posted on the internet showed what is purported to be the couple lying face down in the sand next to their belongings with what appear to be gunshot wounds to the head. This style of killing, along with the fact that according to the Libyan Defense Ministry the couple's car, passports and belongings were all left

untouched, suggests that their deaths were more ideologically motivated and probably represented an opportunistic attack by someone with an antipathy towards Westerners.

The killing in December 2013 of American school teacher Ronnie Smith, who was shot dead while jogging near his Benghazi home, may also have been ideologically motivated. According to an Interior Ministry statement, four unidentified assailants in a black Jeep opened fire on Smith, a chemistry teacher at the Benghazi International School, killing him immediately.³⁸ No one claimed responsibility for his murder. Although there is no evidence of any direct causal link, it is notable that Smith was murdered just days after al-Qa`ida operative Adam Gadahn called on Libyans to take revenge for the apprehension of Abu Anas al-Libi by U.S. forces in October.³⁹

Furthermore, Smith was a devout Christian and appears to have been in Libya partly on a personal proselytizing mission.⁴⁰ As his widow explained in an interview following his killing, "What I want people to know about him...he wanted to shine the light and the love of Jesus to the Libyan people...he really did."⁴¹ Meanwhile a statement posted on the website of the Austin Stone Community Church where Smith was a pastor declared, "Ronnie's greatest desire was for peace and prosperity in Libya and for the people of Libya to have the joy of knowing God through Christ."⁴² Given the sensitivities around proselytizing in Libya and the fact that dozens of Egyptian Christians were rounded up in Benghazi and tortured in 2013 by Islamist militants after being accused of proselytizing, anyone openly promoting Christianity would have been extremely vulnerable.⁴³ Smith

also tweeted mocking comments about Islamist militants.⁴⁴ Neither Smith's tweets nor his sense of Christian mission justify or explain his murder, but they suggest why he might have been a particular target for Islamist militants.

Ideological motivations may also explain the executions of seven Egyptian Coptic Christians at the end of February. According to neighbors, gunmen forced their way into the men's apartment building in the Garoutha suburb of Benghazi and demanded to know which residents were Christian. The Christians in the building were then rounded up and abducted at gunpoint. The Egyptian human rights group Nations Without Borders has recounted how the gunmen also spraypainted a message on the building and other buildings in the area offering 10,000 Libyan dinars (\$8,160) for anyone who hands a Christian over.⁴⁵ The corpses of the abductees were found on a beach approximately 19 miles west of Benghazi.⁴⁶ According to Ibrahim Sharaa of the Benghazi Joint Security Chamber, several of the men were found with their hands bound and with a single gunshot wound to the head.⁴⁷ Shortly afterwards, on March 2, an Egyptian Copt was shot as he was unloading fruit and vegetables from a car onto his market stall in Benghazi's Majouri area.⁴⁸

These are not the first attacks against Egyptian Christians in Libya. There have been numerous incidents, including attacks on Christian churches, as well as the detention of scores of Copts on charges of proselytizing by armed Islamist groups.⁴⁹

about Libyans.

44 In October 2013, he wrote, "Libya Islamists are threatening kidnappings. As if they can fit kidnapping into a 2hr work day that already includes a nap. Losers." See "American Teacher Ronnie Smith Shot Dead While Jogging in Benghazi," *Guardian*, December 5, 2013.

45 "Islamist Militia Group in Libya Suspected in Killing of Seven Coptic Christians," *Morning Star News*, February 25, 2014.

46 "Libya Politics and Security," Menas Associates, March 3, 2014.

47 Ibid.

48 "Another Egyptian Targeted in Benghazi," *Libya Herald*, March 2, 2014.

49 See "Egyptian Copts in Libya Allegedly Detained, Tortured Following 'Missionising' Claims," *al-Abram*,

34 "Kidnapped South Korean Trade Official Freed in Libya," *al-Arabiya*, January 23, 2014.

35 "Abducted South Korean Trade Official Freed in Libya - Government," Reuters, January 22, 2014.

36 "French National Shot Dead in Benghazi," *Libya Herald*, March 2, 2014.

37 "Nusha Ala Shatta Al-Bahr Al-Libi Intaht Bi Rasassa Fee Al-Ras," *al-Arabiya*, January 5, 2014.

38 "American Teacher Slain in Libya," CNN, December 6, 2014.

39 "Al-Qaida: US Committed 'Crime of Piracy' by Kidnapping Abu Anas al-Liby," *Guardian*, December 1, 2013.

40 "Widow of American Teacher Forgives Attackers who Killed her Husband in Libya," CNN, December 21, 2013.

41 Ibid.

42 "Grieving the Loss of Our Brother in Christ," The Austin Stone Community Church, undated.

43 Some Libyans, meanwhile, complained about Smith's alleged posting of a series of tweets that were derogatory

Other Copts or foreign Christians have also been killed. In September 2013, two Egyptian Christians were stopped on a rural road in the militant Islamist stronghold of Derna. The men, Waleed Saad Shaker and Nash'at Shenouda Ishaq, were robbed, tied up and then shot dead after they refused to convert to Islam.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, in March 2014, Iraqi Christian Adison Karkha, a medical school professor, was killed on his way to work in Qadhafi's hometown of Sirte, another town that is fast becoming a center for Islamist militancy.⁵¹ His death came a few months after the killing of Iraqi academic Hamid Khalf, who was abducted on his way to work and later killed in Derna, in November 2013.⁵² Khalf, who had been living in Iraq since 1998, was a Shi'a Muslim. It is believed he may have been killed in retaliation for the execution in Iraq of Libyan citizen Adel al-Zawi who had been convicted of terrorism charges.⁵³

Weak State

While it is difficult to pull these incidents together into a single narrative and in most cases to say with any certainty who was behind them, the pattern of the killings and at least some of the kidnappings suggests that they were the work of Islamist militants and groups. The one aspect these incidents have in common, however, is that as with the kidnappings, no one has been brought to justice. This is partly a result of the weakness of the Libyan state. The central authorities, which are losing legitimacy by the day, still have no real control on the ground, having been unable to build a national army or police force. There is still resistance among the armed groups on the ground to building such a force, which is strongly associated in their minds with the forces of the former regime.

As a result, the state still has to rely on the various brigades and militias to assist whenever there is a crisis.

For example, despite accusations of involvement in the kidnapping of the Egyptian diplomats and Ali Zidan, the LROC is still entrusted with protecting Tripoli under the orders of Abu Sahmaine who, as part of his role as head of the GNC, is also supreme commander of the armed forces. Thus, in many cases, even when the state knows who is behind a crime, it is unable to act. As culture minister and government spokesman Habib al-Ameen lamented recently, "There are *takfiri* groups in Benghazi and Derna and they are responsible for the repeated assassinations. Everyone knows these groups and everyone knows their members and where they are located. But no one can confront them or stop them."⁵⁴

The problem is compounded by the fact that some of these militias and groups have support right at the heart of the political establishment. As al-Ameen explained, there are "political parties inside the congress who are supporting these [*takfiri*] groups and who cover for them and provide them with all facilities."⁵⁵ Although such assertions are difficult to prove, it is clear that the ideological outlook of some congress members is not especially far removed from that of some of the militant groups. Indeed, Ali Zidan accused two hard line Islamist congress members from Zawia—Mohamed al-Ghaylani and Mustafa Treiki—of being involved in his own abduction.⁵⁶

In addition, reports have emerged that Islamist militants are infiltrating official security bodies. In March 2014, the former spokesman of the Benghazi Security Directorate, Tariq al-Kharass, stated, "the state security body is penetrated by the extremists and if someone writes a report about these extremists, the report is leaked and whoever wrote it will be killed instantly."⁵⁷

Conclusion

The array of militant groups has become ever more entrenched and more difficult to challenge in post-Qadhafi Libya, as evidenced by the military parade that was staged by a newly announced group in Derna on April 4, 2014. This evidently well-armed and well-equipped group—the Shura Council of the Youth of Islam in Derna—announced that it was planning to set up special camps and forums to explain the "pure faith" to the people and to open a number of recruitment centers in the town.⁵⁸

It is the entrenchment of these groups and the state's failure to respond that prompted retired Libyan army general Khalifa Hafter to intervene and launch his own assault against militant groups in Benghazi. On May 16, Hafter—backed by the Libyan National Army—staged a number of attacks in a handful of Islamist-dominated neighborhoods in Benghazi. This move prompted other forces to rally in support of Hafter's cause, and a number of militias in Tripoli attacked the Libyan parliament, while Libyan National Army spokesman Mohamed al-Hegazi told Libya's al-Ahrar television that the parliament "is what supports these extremist Islamist entities. The aim was to arrest these Islamist bodies who wear the cloak of politics."⁵⁹

Hafter's actions have plunged Libya even deeper into crisis. The country is highly polarized with talk of civil war. With the Libyan state proving itself incapable of offering any real protection at this time, further killings and kidnappings of both foreigners and Libyans are inevitable.

Alison Pargeter is a Senior Research Fellow at the Royal United Services Institute and a Senior Associate at Menas Associates Consulting Firm. She specializes in security issues in North Africa and in political Islamist movements in the region. Her books include: Libya: The Rise and Fall of Qadhafi (2012), The Muslim Brotherhood: The Burden of Tradition (2010), and The New Frontiers of Jihad: Radical Islam in Europe (2008).

February 28, 2013.

50 "Islamist Militia Group in Libya Suspected in Killing of Seven Coptic Christians."

51 "Report: Christian Iraqi Killed in Libya," Associated Press, March 18, 2014.

52 "Libyan Jihadists Kill Shi'ite in Revenge for Prisoner Executions by Iraq," SITE Intelligence Group, January 15, 2014.

53 Ibid.

54 "Mesoul Libi Rafia Yatarif Lil Mara Oula Biwujoud Al-Takfireen fi Benghazi," *al-Quds al-Arabi*, March 2, 2014.

55 Ibid.

56 "Ghorfat Amaliyat Thuwar Libya Militia Mutheera Li Jedel," *al-Arabiya*, January 30, 2014.

57 "Mesoul Amni Sabak Yakshif Al-Tajawasat fi Mudi-riyat Al-Am Bi Benghazi," *Bawabat al-Wasat*, March 18, 2014.

58 "Tanzeem Jihadi Fi Libya Yalin Adawatahu Lil Kuwat Nidamia," Libya News Network, April 6, 2014.

59 "Rogue Libyan General Launches Anti-Islamist Raid on Parliament," *The National*, May 18, 2014.

The British Foreign Fighter Contingent in Syria

By Raffaello Pantucci

IN MID-APRIL 2014, the British government released its latest annual report on CONTEST, the British counterterrorism strategy. Focusing on the persistent threat from international terrorism faced by the United Kingdom, the document highlighted how the British government is “concerned about the threat to the UK from Syria based groups and the threat from foreign fighters returning to this country.”¹ Officials spoke of 33-50% of security service casework having a Syria component to it.²

The threat of returning fighters from Syria is one that British security officials already believe they have seen and disrupted, specifically in the form of a “Mumbai-style” plot targeting the United Kingdom in October 2013 that reportedly had links to Syria.³ On the ground in Syria, British fighters continue to die and broadcast their activities through a variety of social media platforms, while publicly denying the accusation of wanting to launch attacks in the United Kingdom.⁴ The community of Britons in Syria, however, reveals a group with strong links to criminal networks in the United Kingdom, as well as a growing willingness to publicize violent activity that might constitute war crimes.

Taken alongside the fact that Britons appear to be fighting with a multiplicity of groups (many British fighters who announce their affiliation claim to be members of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, although others appear in images fighting alongside groups connected to Jabhat al-Nusra or even other smaller units), it seems that the threat to the United Kingdom is growing. The actual number of

British fighters in Syria is an imprecise science, with French President Francois Hollande saying in January 2014 that some 700 Britons were fighting in Syria, a figure downplayed by the British government who stood by 350 fighters.⁵ The International Center for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) estimated in December 2013 that there were somewhere between 43-366 British fighters who had traveled to Syria.⁶ A more recent figure was offered by Helen Ball, the senior national coordinator for counterterrorism in the Metropolitan Police, who admitted that as many as 700 Britons might be fighting in Syria.⁷

This article offers a brief background on the alleged Mumbai-style plot that was disrupted in October 2013, and then looks more specifically at the community of British fighters in Syria. It finds that while most British foreign fighters in Syria may not pose a domestic threat to the United Kingdom, it appears likely that some might, especially in light of the recent Mumbai-style plot that reportedly had connections to the Syrian battlefield.

Mumbai-Style Plot

On the evening of October 14, 2013, police staged a dramatic series of arrests across London.⁸ Four men, all allegedly long-term investigative suspects, were picked up in the sweep after authorities believed the group might have had access to firearms.⁹ Two individuals were arrested in a “hard stop” involving shotgun rounds used to blow out the wheels of the car they were driving, a third at his home in Peckham and a final suspect outside an Iranian restaurant in Westbourne Grove.¹⁰

The identities of the four men were not confirmed beyond their ethnicities and ages: all were British nationals, but one

each of Algerian, Azerbaijani, Pakistani and Turkish ethnicity. Ultimately, charges were only brought against the Algerian and Turkish individuals, who were both charged with “making record of information of a kind likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism or possessing a document or record containing information of that kind.”¹¹ The Turkish individual was also accused of “preparing a terrorist act,” while the Algerian was accused of “possession with a false document.”¹² It is believed the other two were released.

There has been a tight hold on further information allowed in the public domain, although the understanding is that the men were believed to be planning a “Mumbai-style” shooting spree attack and the plot was one which had connections to Syria.¹³ One report suggested the men may have met in Syria.¹⁴ Information around the case has been limited with the names of the charged men kept out of the public domain. The case is due to go to trial later in the year.

British Fighters Increasingly Bold in Syria

Syria continues to have connections to Britain’s longstanding Islamist community, and the police have moved to clamp down heavily on the foreign fighter phenomenon at home. In the first three months of 2014, authorities made more than 40 arrests connected to Syria-related activity.¹⁵ At the same time, the groups in Syria have become more bold, with British fighters communicating with the media to discuss their intentions and even going so far as to establish their own media outlet and group in December 2013 known as Rayat al-Tawhid.

1 “CONTEST: The United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering Terrorism, Annual Report,” UK Home Office, April 9, 2014.

2 Ibid.

3 Duncan Gardham, “Police Foil ‘Mumbai-Style’ Terrorist Plot in London, Say Security Sources,” *Guardian*, October 14, 2013.

4 “British Fighters in Syria ‘Not Planning UK Attacks,’” ITV News, April 8, 2014.

5 Tom Whitehead, “700 Britons Fighting in Syria Terror Groups, Warns Hollande,” *Telegraph*, January 31, 2014.

6 “Up to 11,000 Foreign Fighters in Syria; Steep Rise Among Western Europeans,” The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, December 17, 2013.

7 Tom Whitehead, “Up to 700 Britons Feared to be in Syria,” *Telegraph*, April 24, 2014.

8 Sean O’Neill and David Brown, “Syria Link to Terror Arrests in London Raids,” *Times*, October 15, 2014.

9 Justin Davenport, “Police Foil ‘Major Islamist Terror Plot’ After Armed Raids Across London,” *Evening Standard*, October 14, 2013.

10 Ibid.

11 “Two Men Charged with Terrorism Offences,” Press Association, October 20, 2013.

12 Ibid.

13 Gardham, “Police Foil ‘Mumbai-Style’ Terrorist Plot in London, Say Security Sources”; Justin Davenport, “Islamist Terror Suspects Could Have Met During Syria Conflict,” *Evening Standard*, October 15, 2013; Amanda Williams, “Hundreds of British Jihadis Returning From Fight in Syria Spark Terror Alert After Police and MI5 Thwart Mumbai-Style Attack on London,” Mail Online, February 16, 2014.

14 Ibid.

15 Tom Whitehead, “Syria-Related Arrests Soar as Police Urge Mothers and Wives to Stop Would-be Jihadis,” *Telegraph*, April 24, 2014.

The Rayat al-Tawhid branding has become an increasingly prominent feature of reporting in the United Kingdom around Syria, with the group publishing a series of videos and pictures through YouTube, Instagram and Twitter accounts that offer insights into personal experiences on the battlefield. The videos have glorified the fighting, calling on people to leave “the gangster life behind and join the life of jihad.”¹⁶ Other more recent videos have shown the background of their lives near the battlefield, characterizing it as “Five Star Jihad”—a likely ironic reference to earlier images that emerged off the battlefield in which Britons described the luxurious lives they were leading with sweets from home and abandoned mansions with swimming pools in which to live.¹⁷ Rayat al-Tawhid videos reflect a harder life on the battlefield, illustrating the basic living conditions, while also using the videos to solicit funding from the United Kingdom.¹⁸ The group has also posted images of members involved in the apparent execution of an individual identified as a rapist, and in another image one of them is seen with a bag of heads that are apparently from a group of regime soldiers.¹⁹

It is not clear who is behind Rayat al-Tawhid, although their activities and publicity are reminiscent of longstanding British extremist groups. They speak with British accents, and their references to gang culture suggest at least a working knowledge of that life. What is somewhat disturbing about the group is their ease with the extreme violence and brutality of the battlefield in Syria, including involvement in battlefield executions, beheadings and possibly torture. The men all seem eager to maintain their anonymity and only appear in videos with their faces covered, which suggests that they want to protect their families back home from the attention of the authorities, or that

16 Steve Swann, “British Man Recruits for Syria Jihad,” BBC, December 20, 2013.

17 Aris Roussinos, “Jihad Selfies: These British Extremists in Syria Love Social Media,” *Vice*, December 5, 2013.

18 *Know Your Role*, Rayat al-Tawhid, April 25, 2014, available on Instagram.

19 The image of the severed heads was posted on Instagram. The execution video was made public through the reporting of Tom Rayner, “British Fighters Filmed in Syria ‘War Crime,’” *Sky News*, May 2, 2014.

they might plan to eventually return to the United Kingdom. This latter prospect is of great concern to British authorities, given their brutalization and apparent ability to manufacture explosives (a skillset suggested in images in which they show homemade bombs).

Kataib al-Muhajirin/Kataib al-Kawthar

This is not the first time that Britons have emerged in such a public way on the Syrian battlefield. In early 2013, a group called Kataib al-Kawthar began to produce tweets under the handle @KAlKawthar and established a Facebook page that on March 31, 2013, released a video entitled *Commander Abu Musab’s Weekly Address*, purporting to be “the first weekly address of Abu Musab, a western Mujaahid commander who is currently leading his forces against the oppressive regime of al-Assad.”²⁰ Delivered in fluent, but accented, English, the blurb promised regular weekly updates, although it is not clear if any more statements emerged. At around the same time as the video’s publication, Kataib al-Kawthar released a hagiographical video of Abu Kamal al-Swedee in both English and Arabic, with the English language delivered in native sounding English.²¹ Abu Kamal was identified as a Finnish-born Swede with a convert Finnish mother and Swedish father.²²

The video about Abu Kamal appeared to be produced by a parallel or sister group to Kataib al-Kawthar called Kataib al-Muhajirin, a grouping composed of foreign fighters in Syria apparently led by the Georgian Omar al-Shishani. The divisions between the group are unclear, with Abu Musab being referred to in a video released by Kataib al-Muhajirin as one of Omar al-Shishani’s commanders. The Abu Musab in the second video speaks only in Arabic, although prominent in the video are also Sayfullah al-Shishani and Ibrahim al-Mazwagi, a Libyan-Brit who was the first confirmed Briton killed in

20 *Commander Abu Musab’s Weekly Address*, Kataib al-Kawthar, March 30, 2013, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wEOVWLGqQnA.

21 *Shabeed Abu Kamal English Version*, Kataib al-Muhajirin, March 13, 2013, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=vn_8U14K_Gc.

22 Per Gudmundson, “The Swedish Foreign Fighter Contingent in Syria,” *CTC Sentinel* 6:9 (2013).

Syria.²³ A prominent figure who shows up repeatedly in Kataib al-Muhajirin videos, al-Mazwagi (also known as Abu Fidaa) fought previously in Libya and appeared to have enjoyed being filmed fighting in Syria.²⁴ Subsequent to his death, for example, a mini-film emerged showing his activities on the battlefield, joking around with fellow foreign fighters and marrying a Swedish woman who had come to the front.²⁵ In the Abu Kamal video, Abu Fidaa is referred to

“In the first three months of 2014, authorities made more than 40 arrests connected to Syria-related activity.”

alongside suspected British national Abu Qudamah as carrying their fallen Swedish comrade’s body back to an ambulance.²⁶ Abu Qudamah seems to be the battlefield name of another British man from London who was later killed and who features prominently in images released by Kataib al-Muhajirin.

Abu Qudamah and Ibrahim al-Mazwagi feature in a number of images together, as well as with other individuals. Al-Mazwagi is later photographed alongside Omar al-Shishani, while Abu Qudamah is instead featured in a montage set of images published on Facebook by a now closed account in which a group of individuals were heralded as “Green Birds.”²⁷ What is particularly striking about this collection of images is that alongside Abu Qudamah, the montages feature Mohammed el-Araj, Bilal al-Berjawi and Mohammed Sakr. Al-Berjawi and Sakr were two Britons who came from west London and were killed in Somalia fighting alongside al-Shabab.²⁸

23 Richard Kerbaj and Malik al-Abdeh, “Dead at 21: Britain’s Veteran Jihadist,” *Sunday Times*, March 3, 2013.

24 Ibid.

25 Inigo Gilmore, “Britons Fighting with Syria’s Jihadist ‘Band of Brothers,’” Channel 4 News, June 14, 2013.

26 *Shabeed Abu Kamal English Version*.

27 Roussinos.

28 For a more complete story about al-Berjawi’s and Sakr’s adventures in Somalia, see Raffaello Pantucci, “Bilal al-Berjawi and the Shifting Fortunes of Foreign Fighters in Somalia,” *CTC Sentinel* 6:9 (2013).

Mohammed el-Araj, on the other hand, was a Briton of Palestinian descent from Ladbroke Grove in west London who was killed in Syria in August 2013.²⁹ El-Araj was an engineering student who was arrested in January 2009 at a protest outside the Israeli Embassy.³⁰ Also arrested at the protest were Mohammed Sakr and Walla Rehman, although both received far lighter punishments than el-Araj—Sakr and Rehman were charged with affray under the public order act, while el-Araj was charged with handling stolen goods. Rehman's significance within this context comes from the fact that he was identified as being involved in the same network as al-Berjawi and Sakr in East Africa.³¹

It is of course impossible to know the extent or importance of these connections, although it is notable that the men all come from a relatively similar part of London. It is possible that the young men all knew each other and the grouping behind them is one that has previously helped fighters reach Somalia and is now directing people toward Syria.³² What is certainly concerning about this grouping is that it has clearly pledged allegiance and fought alongside Omar al-Shishani, a man who was the leader of foreign fighters in Syria and has now moved over to be a sub-commander to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the head of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)—one of the most violent groups in Syria. The other Chechen visible in the aforementioned video featuring Omar and Abu Musab, Sayfullah al-Shishani, appears to have broken away from Omar to set up a more independent faction fighting alongside Jabhat al-Nusra.³³ He was killed in early February 2014 in an attack on Aleppo prison where the first recorded British suicide

bomber, Abdul Waheed Majid, killed himself.³⁴ A long-term activist himself, Abdul Waheed Majid had featured on the periphery of serious terrorist investigations in the United Kingdom for some time, including the large 2004 plot called Crevice that intended to target a shopping mall outside London with a large fertilizer-based explosive device.³⁵

Historical and Criminal Networks

The war in Syria also has connections to longstanding members of the jihadist community in the United Kingdom. British foreign fighter Abdel Majed Abdel Bary, for example, is the son of Adel Abdel Bary, who was extradited to the United States in 2012 after spending years in British custody.³⁶ He stands accused of being the leader of Egyptian Islamic Jihad's cell in London in the 1990s and of providing support to Usama bin Ladin by helping to run a media outpost for al-Qa`ida.³⁷ He is also accused of involvement in the 1998 East Africa U.S. Embassy bombings.³⁸ The younger Bary, a former grime music rapper from west London, seems to have had a radical damascene moment in mid-2013, and in July declared on his Facebook page that "the unknown mixtape with my bro tabanacle will be the last music I'm ever releasing. I have left everything for the sake of Allah."³⁹ In October 2013, he used his Twitter feed to ask "for everyone that still asks me about where my videos have gone, like I said a while back I quit music & I took all the vids I can down...& if you own a channel that has any of my music up can you take it down also, appreciated. Bless."⁴⁰

34 "UK 'Suicide Bomber' Abdul Waheed Majid Video Posted Online," BBC, February 14, 2014.

35 Raffaello Pantucci, "Syria's First British Suicide Bomber: The UK Jihadist Backdrop," Royal United Services Institute, February 14, 2014.

36 Chris Greenwood, "Fighting Jihad in Syria, The British 'Grime' Rapper from £1m Home in Maida Vale, West London, Who is the Son of a Suspected Al Qaeda Mastermind," *Daily Mail*, December 31, 2013.

37 "Fact Sheet on Extradition of 5 Terrorism Suspects to US: Information on Charges," U.S. Embassy London, October 5, 2012.

38 Ibid.

39 This post, dated July 1, 2013, is available at www.facebook.com/LyricistJinn/posts/634492946562118.

40 Twitter feed @ItsLJinny, October 9, 2013.

In other moments, the younger Bary referred to his missing father, pushed back against those who defamed the ISIL, and repeatedly denied accusations that he was in some way connected to prominent British extremist preacher Anjem Choudary. Mentioned in an early profile that exposed him publicly as fighting in Syria,⁴¹ Bary seemed offended by the prospect, stating at one point "why linking me to anjem choudary again though, I dont know the man and we aint on the same wave lol hes on that microphone jihad."⁴² In another post, he reported how he and a fellow Briton were "kidnapped/ tortured by FSA/IF scum they stole our ak's and a 7mm, my vehicle & our phones and cash."⁴³ Highlighting the circles in which he operated back in the United Kingdom, in mid-March 2014 he declared that "my lil brother ahmed got sentenced to life...26 years minimum.... love lil bro see you in the afterlife inshallah #kasper."⁴⁴ He appears to be referring to Ahmed Kasper Mikhaimar, a convicted burglar who in January 2014 was sentenced to 26 years incarceration for the murder of a teenager on London's streets.⁴⁵

This link to serious criminality can be found elsewhere among Britain's community of fighters in Syria. Choukri Ellekhlifi, a Briton of Moroccan descent from Paddington west London who used the name Abu Hujama, was killed in August 2013 alongside his brother-in-arms Mohammed el-Araj.⁴⁶ Prior to coming to Syria, Ellekhlifi had been arrested with Mohammed Elyasse Taleouine and Mohammed Ibrahim in August 2012 after a series of brutal robberies in London's affluent Belgravia district where masked men on bicycles attacked people walking the streets, threatening them with a taser while they stole their possessions.⁴⁷ In two cases,

41 Greenwood.

42 Twitter feed @ItsLJinny, March 9, 2014.

43 "The Scum Stole our Cash," *Daily Mail*, March 9, 2014.

44 Twitter feed @ItsLJinny, March 13, 2014.

45 William Turvill, "Five Thugs who Killed a Schoolboy Stabbing Him with Swords and Meat Cleavers in one of Britain's Wealthiest Postcodes are Jailed for 131 Years," *Daily Mail*, January 31, 2014.

46 Amie Keeley, "Four Britons 'Killed Fighting in Syrian Civil War With Al Qaeda Rebels,'" Mail Online, November 20, 2013.

47 Duncan Gardham, "The Al Qaeda Fanatic from Brit-

29 Shiv Malik and Haroon Siddique, "Briton Killed Fighting in Syria Civil War," *Guardian*, November 20, 2013.

30 Ibid.

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

32 It is possible that there is a similar structure at play in Belgium in a case currently working its way through the system in which fighters were being sent to both Somalia and Syria. See "L'epouse de Rachid Benomari lui envoyait de l'argent en Somalie," *La Libre*, March 10, 2014.

33 "An In-Depth Look At Chechen Fighters in Syria - Part I: Sayfullah Al-Shishani and His Circle," Middle East Media Research Institute, December 6, 2013.

they used the taser on their victims.⁴⁸ The men were released on bail, and it appears that at this point Ellekhlifi fled the country and traveled to Syria where he joined the fighting.⁴⁹ Taleouine was re-arrested on January 10, 2013, when counterterrorism officers undertook an “intelligence-led operation” into “alleged facilitation of travel overseas for terrorism.”⁵⁰ Searching Taleouine’s property, police discovered a converted 9mm MAC-10 submachine gun, and he ultimately pleaded guilty to firearms offenses and robbery charges.⁵¹ Taleouine was sentenced to 10 years in jail.⁵²

Abdel Majed Abdel Bary also provides a connection to another relation of a prominent British individual previously accused of involvement with radical circles. On April 18, 2014, Bary tweeted “Subhanallah just seen the brother less than 2 weeks ago, may Allah accept his shahada, Abdullah Deghayas, martyr inshallah.”⁵³ This was a reference to Abdullah Deghayes, an 18-year-old Briton of Libyan descent who was killed fighting in Kassab, Latakia.⁵⁴ The nephew of former Guantanamo detainee Omar Deghayes, Abdullah is the middle child of three brothers who have left their homes in Brighton to fight alongside a Libyan unit in Syria called al-Battar.⁵⁵ His older brother Amer was shot in the stomach during the same clash, while his younger brother Jaffer is the youngest publicly confirmed Briton fighting in Syria at 16 years of age.⁵⁶ Their father has since pleaded for his two remaining sons to return home, although it seems uncertain whether this will be possible.⁵⁷

ain who Funded Jihad Trip to Syria by Mugging Londoners with a Taser,” *Mail on Sunday*, November 30, 2013.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Metropolitan Police statement, undated, available at www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.53847542619990.1.1073741856.423306314383480&type=3.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Twitter feed @ItsLJinny, April 18, 2014.

54 “Father Scared for Sons in Syria,” Press Association, April 21, 2014.

55 Conal Urquhart and Shiv Malik, “Teenager From Brighton Killed Within Weeks of Joining Syrian Conflict,” *Guardian*, April 18, 2014.

56 Urquhart and Malik.

57 Shiv Malik, “Father of UK Teenager Killed in Syria Implores his Other Sons to Return,” *Guardian*, April 20, 2014.

The final connection to longstanding members of the UK jihadist scene is the case of Moazzam Begg, the former Guantanamo Bay detainee and founder of the Azzam Publications bookshop in Birmingham.⁵⁸ UK authorities arrested Begg on February 25, 2014, and charged him with providing terrorist training as well as funding terrorism overseas.⁵⁹ Arrested alongside him were Gerrie and Mouloud Tahari, a mother and son who are also charged with supporting terrorism overseas.⁶⁰ Begg’s arrest elicited substantial public outcry and his trial later in the year is likely to prove a major spectacle as he fights against perceived persecution.

Portsmouth’s Bangladeshi Bad Boys

Another cluster of Britons drawn to Syria can be found in Portsmouth where a group that seems to in part echo a local *da`wa* (propagation) community has gone to fight in Syria alongside the ISIL. The Portsmouth *Da`wa* Team continues to carry out its peaceful activities in the city center, and there has been no evidence presented that it is connected to terrorism. A number of former members, however, have gone to fight in Syria. Most prominently, Iftekar Jaman, a former call center employee and son of fast food restaurant owners, became something of a celebrity jihadist through his online media profile.⁶¹ In November 2013, he achieved particular notoriety when he was interviewed by the BBC’s flagship *Newsnight* program.⁶² He was also responsible for helping to facilitate travel to Syria for two other Britons who used the pseudonyms Abu Qaqa and Abu Layth al-Khorasani.⁶³ Abu Layth was later revealed to be a Manchester-born student at Liverpool University and part-time amateur boxer

58 “UK Ex-Guantanamo Detainee Moazzam Begg Remanded in Custody,” BBC, March 1, 2014.

59 Ibid.

60 “Mouloud Tahari: Briton, 20, Charged over Funding Syria Terrorism,” *Independent*, March 4, 2014.

61 Edward Malnick and Richard Spencer, “British ‘Celebrity Jihadi’ and Chef Dies in Syria,” *Telegraph*, December 17, 2013.

62 Richard Watson, “Briton ‘Doing his Duty’ by Fighting with Group Linked to al Qaeda in Syria,” BBC, November 21, 2013.

63 Tam Hussein, “Social Media Jihadi: The Inside Story of a Briton who Died Fighting for ISIS,” Huffington Post, February 6, 2014.

called Anil Khalil Raoufi.⁶⁴ Both Raoufi and Iftekar Jaman have since been killed fighting.⁶⁵

Others from the Portsmouth cluster who are still fighting in Syria include former private schoolboy and fitness fanatic Muhammad Hassan.⁶⁶ Hassan, another participant in the Portsmouth *da`wa* group, is a regular on social media and promotes the ISIL’s cause.⁶⁷ In mid-November 2013, another Portsmouth man, Muhammad Hamidur Rahman, a manager at a local retail clothing store, told his family he was heading to Syria as part of an aid convoy only to reemerge weeks later as a fighter alongside the ISIL.⁶⁸ Both men are believed to still be fighting in Syria.

In contrast, Mashudur Choudhury, who recently became the first Briton to be convicted of terrorism charges related to the conflict in Syria,⁶⁹ was arrested upon his return to the United Kingdom on October 26, 2013.⁷⁰ He had left for Syria on October 8 with four other Portsmouth men on a commercial flight to Turkey (including Muhammad Hamidur Rahman and Muhammad Hassan) after long conversations via various social media and online communication methods, including Skype, with Iftekar Jaman.⁷¹ In one of these messages, Choudhury suggested that the group he was traveling with should call themselves the “Britani brigade Bangladeshi bad boys,” which elicited a “lol sounds long” from Jaman.⁷² Choudhury was also revealed to have argued about his activity with his wife who saw him as a fantasist

64 Yakub Qureshi, “Anil Khalil Raoufi, 20, Killed Fighting in Syria Thought War was ‘Like Star Wars,’” *Manchester Evening News*, February 13, 2014.

65 Ibid.

66 Dipesh Gadher, David Leppard, Hala Jaber, Toby Harnden and Laura Molyneaux, “We Need to Start Taking Heads Off: The YouTube Jihadists who Pose a Risk to Britain,” *Sunday Times*, January 12, 2014.

67 Dipesh Gadher and Laura Molyneaux, “Portsmouth’s Primark Jihadist Surfaces in Syria,” *Sunday Times*, December 1, 2013.

68 Ibid.

69 Dominic Casciani, “Mashudur Choudhury: Serial Liar and Jihadist,” BBC, May 20, 2014.

70 Tom Whitehead, “Man Travelled to Syrian Terror Training Camp After Angry Wife Said ‘Go Die on Battlefield,’ Court Told,” *Telegraph*, May 7, 2014.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

and who finally told him in a July text message to “go die in battlefield. Go die, I really mean it just go. I’ll be relieved. At last. At last.”⁷³

Conclusion

The flow of foreign fighters to Syria from the United Kingdom continues, although the scale is difficult to determine. The trends are worrisome, with the preponderance of longstanding networks of individuals involved in radical activity, the continued featuring of British nationals fighting alongside the ISIL, and the fact that a number of these nationals are connected to serious criminal networks in the United Kingdom. These factors highlight a trend that is likely to develop into future threats. The twin incidents of the murder of Lee Rigby in Woolwich by longstanding activist Michael Adebolajo and the suicide bombing in Aleppo by Abdul Waheed Majid, a man with almost two decades of radical activity, serve to highlight the persistent and long-term threat that such radicalized individuals can pose.

Thus far, only one domestic terrorist plot in the United Kingdom has been reported as having a connection to Syria, but there is an expectation that more will emerge.⁷⁴ While most fighters who return from Syria may not pose a threat, it is likely that some will. British fighters state that they have no intention of carrying out attacks in the United Kingdom, but the indicators from across Europe (including the recently foiled Mumbai-style plot) suggest that future domestic threats connected to the war in Syria are likely to emerge.⁷⁵

Raffaello Pantucci is a Senior Research Fellow at the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI) and is grateful for the support of the Airey Neave Trust in his work on foreign fighters.

73 Ibid.

74 O’Neill and Brown.

75 Raffaello Pantucci, “Thick as Thieves: European Criminals Take to Syria’s Battlefield,” Royal United Services Institute, March 31, 2014.

A Profile of Ahrar-ul-Hind and Ansar-ul-Mujahidin in Pakistan

By Zia Ur Rehman

ON MARCH 1, 2014, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Pakistani government agreed to a month-long temporary cease-fire to negotiate a peace deal. A few days after the announcement, two little-known militant groups—Ahrar-ul-Hind and Ansar-ul-Mujahidin—carried out two terrorist attacks in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad and Hangu District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, killing dozens of people.¹ Although the cease-fire ended in April due to disagreements between the Pakistani government and the TTP, the attacks by Ahrar-ul-Hind and Ansar-ul-Mujahidin appeared to reveal that there are factions within the TTP that strictly oppose any negotiation with the government.²

This article provides a brief background on the attacks during the recent peace talks, profiles Ahrar-ul-Hind and Ansar-ul-Mujahidin, and assesses the overall implications of potential splintering within the TTP.

Violation of the Peace Talks

Although some analysts expected a Pakistani military operation against TTP strongholds following a bloody start to 2014, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif instead announced on January 29 that his government would pursue peace talks with the TTP.³ Sharif named a four-member committee to facilitate the talks. In turn, the TTP also nominated a committee for dialogue with the government.⁴

After several meetings between the committees from both sides, the TTP announced a month-long cease-fire on March 1 and directed all groups working under the umbrella of the TTP to honor

1 Malik Asad and Muawar Azeem, “Judge, 10 Others Slain in Islamabad Court Attack,” *Dawn*, March 4, 2014; Ahmed Naveed Zafar, “Four FC Personnel Martyred in Hangu Bomb Attack,” *Pakistan Tribune*, March 5, 2014.

2 Zahir Shah Sherazi, “TTP Decided Not to Extend Ceasefire,” *Dawn*, April 16, 2014.

3 “PM Sharif Announces Another Push for Taliban Peace Talks,” *Dawn*, January 29, 2014.

4 Ibid.

the truce with the government and to refrain from all “jihadist” activities during this period.⁵ In response, the Pakistani government also announced a cease-fire.⁶

On March 3, however, an attack at the Islamabad district court killed 11 people, including a session judge.⁷ Ahrar-ul-Hind, a little-known militant group, claimed responsibility.⁸ The group’s spokesman, Asad Mansoor, told reporters that they are not bound to follow a cease-fire of any kind with the Pakistani government. “We were a part of TTP earlier but now we operate independently,” the spokesman said.⁹

Then, on March 5, a roadside bomb struck a paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC) personnel convey in Hangu District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, killing six FC personnel.¹⁰ Another militant group, Ansar-ul-Mujahidin, claimed responsibility.¹¹ Abu Bassir, the organization’s spokesperson, said that the attack was in reaction to the killing of Taliban fighters in drone attacks in Pakistan’s tribal areas.¹² He also added that his group is not part of the TTP and therefore is not bound by the cease-fire.¹³

Following the attacks, media and civil society groups made growing demands for a full-scale military operation against the TTP. The TTP leadership, however, publicly expressed frustration that some militant groups had not abided by the cease-fire.¹⁴ In a March 3 statement, TTP spokesperson Shahidullah Shahid denied any involvement in the Islamabad court attack, saying that the TTP was struggling to enforce Shari’a

5 “Pakistani Taliban Announce Month-Long Ceasefire,” *Dawn*, March 2, 2014.

6 Muhammad Anees, “Government Announces Cease-fire Following TTP,” *The News Tribune*, March 2, 2014.

7 “Judge, 10 Others Killed in Islamabad Blasts, Firing,” *Dawn*, March 3, 2014.

8 Ibid.

9 Azad Syed, “Hello, We Are Ahrarul Hind, We Attacked Islamabad,” *The News International*, March 4, 2014.

10 “Bomb Kills Six Near Hangu,” *Newsweek Pakistan*, March 5, 2014.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Hasan Abdullah, “TTP Frustrated at ‘Defiance’ Over Ceasefire,” *Dawn*, March 6, 2014.

in Pakistan and that they considered a violation of the cease-fire “un-Islamic.”¹⁵ He said that anyone belonging to the Taliban would be questioned if found guilty of any violent incident during the cease-fire.¹⁶

Sources said that the TTP leadership formed a special cell to identify the militants associated with Ahrar-ul-Hind and Ansar-ul-Mujahidin.¹⁷ Professor Ibrahim, a member of the Taliban’s negotiation committee, confirmed that

“Although few details have emerged about Ahrar-ul-Hind, one militant source said that many of its members are from Punjab Province.”

the TTP leadership was chasing down the little-known groups—especially Ahrar-ul-Hind.¹⁸ Maulana Yousaf Shah, another member of the Taliban’s negotiation committee, said that the TTP leaders would first try to persuade the splinter groups to abide by the cease-fire. If the groups refused, said Shah, then the TTP would take strict action against them.¹⁹

It is not clear what became of these threats, although by April the cease-fire was no longer in effect after the TTP accused the Pakistani government of killing 50 TTP activists.²⁰ Nevertheless, the formation of Ahrar-ul-Hind and Ansar-ul-Mujahidin has important implications for future peace deals between the TTP and the Pakistani government.

A Profile of Ahrar-ul-Hind

Ahrar-ul-Hind first entered the spotlight on February 9, 2014, when Asad Mansoor, the group’s spokesman, issued a statement to media outlets declaring that the group would not accept any peace agreement short of the complete enforcement of Shari`a in Pakistan.²¹ On February 14, the group released another statement rebuking those who support peace talks before the implementation of Shari`a.²²

Mansoor claimed that Ahrar-ul-Hind is headed by Maulana Umar Qasmi.²³ A *Newsweek Pakistan* report suggested that Qasmi, from Jhang district of Punjab Province, was associated with Sipahi-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), a banned sectarian militant group.²⁴ Qasmi was also reportedly enrolled at Usman-o-Ali seminary, run by Maulana Masood Azhar, the head of the banned Jaysh-i-Muhammad group, in Bahawalpur.²⁵ Apart from the TTP and Jaysh-i-Muhammad, Ahrar-ul-Hind reportedly has ties with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Harkat-ul-Mujahidin and Jundullah.²⁶

Although few details have emerged about Ahrar-ul-Hind, one militant source said that many of its members are from Punjab Province.²⁷ Several eyewitnesses to the Islamabad court attack in Islamabad reported hearing the militants speaking Punjabi to one another.²⁸ This suggests that the group may have splintered from TTP Punjab,²⁹ which is headed by Asmatullah Muawiya.³⁰ Muawiya has been openly

engaged in the recent peace talks with the government.³¹

Some reports suggest that Qasmi is now based in Mohmand Agency, a tribal region situated on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border area.³² A Taliban commander in the tribal areas said that Ahrar-ul-Hind had also contacted militants loyal to a faction formerly headed by Badar Mansoor, al-Qa`ida’s chief in Pakistan who was killed in a drone strike in February 2012, to join their group.³³

According to a commander of a Taliban group, the group derived its name of “Ahrar” because the Ahraris were against the formation of Pakistan, and they believed that the entire subcontinent was their homeland.³⁴ Explaining Ahrar-ul-Hind’s objectives, the commander said that the group plans to expand the fight to “the remaining part of the subcontinent, India and Occupied Kashmir.”³⁵

Ansar-ul-Mujahidin

The North Waziristan-based Ansar-ul-Mujahidin has existed since at least March 2013. Reports citing government officials and intelligence information suggest that Mufti Shafique, a leader of the TTP Gandapur group,³⁶ has ties to Ansar-ul-Mujahidin,³⁷ and that Uzbek fighters are also part of the group.³⁸

The group claimed credit for a double suicide bombing on a Shi`a mosque in Parachinar town of Kurram Agency on July 26, 2013, which killed at least 57 people.³⁹ Ansar-ul-Mujahidin also claimed responsibility for three suicide attacks on different military checkpoints in North Waziristan Agency in 2013.⁴⁰

31 Ibid.

32 Ahmed.

33 Tarakzai.

34 Rana.

35 Ibid.

36 The TTP Gandapur group is associated with the central TTP and they operate in Kolachi and other neighboring areas of Dera Ismail Khan District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province.

37 Muhammad Irfan Mughal, “Shadowy Groups Claim Killing KP Minister,” *Dawn*, October 20, 2013.

38 Amir Mir, “Ansarul Mujahideen is Part and Parcel of TTP,” *The News International*, March 6, 2014.

39 Zahir Shah Sherazi, “Anti-Drone Militant Group Claims Parachinar Twin Blasts,” *Dawn*, July 27, 2013.

40 Ibid.

15 Tahir Khan, “Clear Their Name: TTP Denies Hand in Capital Assault,” *Express Tribune*, March 4, 2014.

16 Ibid.

17 “TTP Investigating About Ahrarul Hind: Ibrahim,” *Pakistan Today*, March 16, 2014.

18 Ibid.

19 “Taliban nay Ahrarul Hind Jaisi Tanzeemo ka koj lagaliya,” *Daily Nai Baat*, March 10, 2014.

20 Sherazi, “TTP Decided Not to Extend Ceasefire.”

21 Ismail Khan, “Spoilers in the Game,” *Dawn*, March 4, 2014.

22 Ibid.

23 Khaled Ahmed, “The Coming Apocalypse,” *Newsweek Pakistan*, April 1, 2014.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Asim Qadeem Rana, “TTP, Ahrar-ul-Hind Ate and Slept Together,” *The Nation*, March 6, 2014.

27 Sajid Tarakzai, “Shadowy Militant Splinter Group Threaten Pakistan Peace Talks,” *Agence France-Presse*, March 9, 2014.

28 Ibid.

29 TTP Punjab, also called the Punjabi Taliban, is a loose conglomeration of members of different banned militant groups of Punjabi origin who have developed connections to the TTP and al-Qa`ida.

30 Fasihur Rehman Khan, “Qaeda Now Relying on Punjabi Taliban Instead of Pashtuns,” *The Nation*, February 24, 2014.

Ansar-ul-Mujahidin claimed the October 16, 2013, killing of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa law minister Israr Gandapur, along with nine other people, in Dera Ismail Khan, in retaliation for the death of two of their men during an attack on Dera Ismail Khan jail on July 29, 2013.⁴¹ Taliban militants freed 248 militants from the jail, including 48 high profile militants from the TTP and Lashkar-i-Jhangvi.⁴² The TTP previously claimed

“The large number of distinct and competing armed actors suggests that putting an end to violent insurgency through dialogue will remain a distant possibility even if the government and the TTP agree on a peace deal.”

responsibility for that same jailbreak. Security officials initially said that they were trying to determine whether Ansar-ul-Mujahidin is part of the TTP, or if the claim was a TTP tactic to avoid responsibility.⁴³

Ansar-ul-Mujahidin had also claimed responsibility for the October 11, 2013, suicide attack on a security convoy in the Wana area of South Waziristan that killed two security officials, saying that the attack was a response to the September 6 drone attack in North Waziristan Agency that killed the Haqqani network's key leader, Mullah Sangin Zadran.⁴⁴

In December 2013, Ansar-ul-Mujahidin also warned Pakistan Tehrik-i-Insaf party chief Imran Khan and Jamiat-i-Ulama-i-Islam (Sami faction) chief Maulana Sami-ul-Haq against championing the polio vaccination campaign. “Khan and Haq should

refrain themselves from the anti-polio campaign,” said Abu Bassir at that time, threatening that “at the moment, their focus is toward Nawaz Sharif's government, but they will turn their guns on Khan and Haq if they do not relent.”⁴⁵ On November 9, 2013, the group also directed a message to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his brother and Chief Minister of Punjab Province Shahbaz Sharif, threatening to kill them with suicide bombers as revenge for the November 1 death of TTP chief Hakimullah Mehsud in a drone strike.⁴⁶

Implications

Attacks carried out by Ahrar-ul-Hind and Ansar-ul-Mujahidin have two possible implications.

First, some analysts believe that the Pakistani government's effort to achieve a peace deal with the TTP has exposed a split in the group, suggesting that it has lost influence over its various factions. The TTP, for example, is not a monolith; it is composed of many different groups. According to one general estimate, 54 militant groups operate in the tribal areas and settled districts, with 43 of them operating in North Waziristan alone.⁴⁷ When the government entered into peace negotiations with the TTP, according to this theory, some militant groups began carrying out attacks on their own for reasons varying from tribal affiliation, sectarian views, or ties with foreign militants such as al-Qa`ida.⁴⁸ Therefore, the splintering of the TTP means that even a successful peace deal with the group will not end militancy in the tribal regions.

Second, other analysts and police officials allege that the TTP leadership purposely allowed various “so-called” splinter groups to continue with their subversive activities to place pressure on Pakistan while the main TTP factions publicly engaged in the cease-fire. According to this theory, the TTP

used the peace talks and the cease-fire to regroup for future attacks against the Pakistani government.⁴⁹ Moreover, on May 28, 2014, the TTP Waliur Rehman faction, led by Khan Said (also known as Sajna), announced its separation from the TTP, alleging that the current Maulana Fazlullah-led TTP is bombing public places using fake names to avoid responsibility.⁵⁰

Conclusion

Even if Ahrar-ul-Hind and Ansar-ul-Mujahidin operate outside the influence of the TTP leadership, they could have support from al-Qa`ida and other anti-state elements, especially foreign militant outfits.⁵¹ Returning normalcy to the Pakistani tribal areas is not in the interests of foreign militant groups due to their ongoing operations in neighboring Afghanistan. Experts believe that foreign militant groups, especially al-Qa`ida and Uzbek militants, are worried that a peace deal might close their safe heavens in North Waziristan.⁵²

While such splits among militant groups may be a reason for the Pakistani government to rejoice when combating them militarily, the large number of distinct and competing armed actors suggests that putting an end to violent insurgency through dialogue will remain a distant possibility even if the government and the TTP agree on a future peace deal.⁵³

Zia Ur Rehman is a journalist and researcher who covers militancy and security issues in Pakistan. He has written for the Friday Times, New York Times, Dawn, The Jamestown Foundation and The News. He is also author of the book Karachi in Turmoil.

41 “Pakistan Jailbreak: Taliban Free 248 in Dera Ismail Khan,” BBC, July 30, 2013.

42 Ibid.

43 Mughal.

44 Zulfiqar Ali, “Act of Revenge: Ansarul Mujahideen Claims Responsibility of Wana Blast,” *Express Tribune*, October 13, 2013.

45 Nazar ul Islam, “Militants Warn Khan, Haq Against Police Campaign,” *Newsweek Pakistan*, December 19, 2013.

46 Mir.

47 Khan, “Spoilers in the Game.”

48 Daud Khattak, “Taliban Turf Wars Block Peace,” *Foreign Policy*, March 5, 2014; Mehreen Zahra-Malik, “Violent Splinter Groups Mars Peace Deal with Pakistan Taliban,” Reuters, March 7, 2014.

49 Tarakzai.

50 These details are based on an official press release sent to this author from Azam Tariq, the spokesman of the TTP Waliur Rehman faction, on May 28, 2014.

51 Zahra-Malik.

52 Personal interview, Raees Ahmed, Karachi-based security analyst, May 23, 2014.

53 Khattak.

Al-Hijra: Al-Shabab's Affiliate in Kenya

By Fredrick Nzes

IN SEPTEMBER 2013, militants linked to al-Shabab carried out a deadly attack at the upscale Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi's Westlands area. The assault killed 67 people and refocused international attention on the organization.¹ The operation appeared to embolden al-Shabab, which until that point had been on the defensive in Somalia.² As the attack on the Westgate mall unfolded, al-Shabab claimed responsibility through Twitter posts, stating that they sent men armed with AK-47s into the shopping mall to retaliate against Kenya's invasion of Somalia in 2011.³ As they had done previously, al-Shabab followed these tweets with warnings that Kenya's failure to withdraw its forces from Somalia would have dire consequences.⁴ Evidence quickly emerged that al-Shabab affiliates in Kenya assisted the militants in executing the Westgate shopping mall attack.⁵

This article profiles al-Hijra, formerly known as the Muslim Youth Center (MYC), which is considered a key al-Shabab affiliate in Kenya and East Africa.⁶ It traces al-Hijra's evolution from the MYC to a group with a substantial underground network in Kenya, capable of posing a major threat to domestic security.⁷ Understanding al-Shabab's network in Kenya is especially important in the wake of continued attacks targeting Kenya, the latest of

1 "It's Not Over, Somali Terrorists Say After Mall Attack That Killed 67," CNN, October 2, 2013.

2 Nevertheless, months before the assault, a string of grenade and small improvised explosive device attacks occurred in Nairobi, Mombasa, Garissa Wajir and Mandera, killing and injuring Kenyan civilians, police, and military officers. See "African Politics: Diverse Threat," *Economist*, October 15, 2013; "At Least 10 Killed in Grenade Attack in Northern Kenya," *Africa Review*, June 23, 2013.

3 "Somali Terror Group Al-Shabaab Claims Responsibility for Kenya Mall Attack," NBC, September 21, 2013.

4 Ibid.

5 "Trial of Westgate Attack Suspects Begin," *Daily Nation*, January 15, 2014.

6 "Security Agencies Worry About New Terrorist Threats in Kenya," *Sunday Nation*, October 12, 2013.

7 Ibid.

which killed 10 people in Nairobi on May 16, 2014.⁸

A Profile of Al-Hijra

Al-Hijra is a covert group of primarily Kenyan Somali and non-Somali Muslim followers of al-Shabab in East Africa. It is reportedly led by Shaykh Ahmad Iman Ali, who left Kenya to join al-Shabab in Somalia in 2009.⁹ Al-Hijra's geographic center of support is on the Muslim Swahili coast of Kenya and Tanzania, although its base is in the Majengo area of Nairobi.¹⁰

Al-Hijra's predecessor, the MYC, was formed at the Pumwani Riyadhha Mosque, one of the oldest Islamic institutions in Nairobi, as a community-based organization in 2008.¹¹ The MYC's primary objective was to offer counseling, as well as to work for positive social and economic change for the Muslim youth in the Majengo slums who felt discriminated against as Muslim minorities in Kenya.¹² The MYC was funded by the Pumwani Riyadhha Mosque Committee (PRMC) through money generated from, among other sources, large sections of land in the Majengo slums and by rent payments from second-hand clothing stalls in the nearby Gikomba market—land which the PRMC owns.¹³ The PRMC is also said to control large storage facilities where traders keep their goods and pay rents.¹⁴ The slum and the Gikomba market border Eastleigh, a district in Nairobi

8 Jason Straziuso, "Bombings Kill 10, Wound 70 in Kenyan Market," ABC News, May 16, 2014.

9 "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Pursuant to the Security Council Resolution 2002 (2011)," United Nations, 2012.

10 "Security Agencies Worry About New Terrorist Threats in Kenya."

11 For more details, see the mosque's website at www.Pumwanimasjid.kbc.co.ke. Also see "Al-Shabaab Names Kenyan Leader," *Somalia Report*, January 10, 2012; "Was Sheikh Rogo Shot by Americans Agents?" *The Star* [Nairobi], January 10, 2012.

12 "MYC Behind Extensive Funding, Recruiting and Training of Mujahedeen in Kenya," Middle East Media Research Institute, August 2012.

13 "Muslim Kenyans Fund and Recruit Al-Shabaab, UN Report," Reuters, July 29, 2011. Gikomba market, which is located next to the slum, hosts the largest second-hand clothing market in East Africa. Also see personal interviews, individuals in Majengo, Nairobi, Kenya, October 2013.

14 Nyambega Gisesa, "A Portrait of a Jihadist Born and Bred in Nairobi," *Daily Nation*, January 30, 2012.

that residents call "Little Mogadishu" because of its large population of Kenyan Somalis and refugees who have fled the war in Somalia.

The MYC, however, reportedly developed links to al-Shabab, and was accused of recruiting Kenyan youth to fight for the terrorist group in Somalia.¹⁵ The MYC thrived by generating funds, as well as recruiting and training networks for al-Shabab in Kenyan towns

"In October 2013, UN and European officials expressed concern that al-Shabab and al-Hijra were planning future attacks employing the Westgate tactical model."

such as Nairobi, Garissa, Mombasa and Eldoret.¹⁶ Some of the recruits had their travel facilitated to Somalia, where they would fight for al-Shabab.¹⁷

The MYC's founder, Shaykh Ahmad Iman Ali, was reportedly born in 1973 or 1974 in Kenya.¹⁸ He studied engineering in Nairobi, where he graduated in 1997 or 1998 (although other reports claim he graduated in 2001).¹⁹ After graduation, he worked for Shell and Exxon Mobil oil companies as an engineer.²⁰ As a youth leader at the Pumwani Riyadhha Mosque, Iman Ali oversaw the construction of a new mosque building. In 2007, he masterminded the ouster of the executive committee of the Pumwani Riyadhha Mosque, leading to the removal of five officials over alleged corruption and mismanagement.²¹ Al-Shabab's

15 "Masterminds Target Youth to Execute Terror Attacks," *Daily Nation*, March 3, 2014.

16 "UN Report Links Nairobi to Somali Militants, WANTEDinAfrica.com, August 1, 2011.

17 "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Pursuant to the Security Council Resolution 2002 (2011)"; "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2060 (2012)," United Nations, 2013.

18 "Are These the Faces Behind Westgate Mall Attack," *Daily Nation*, September 29, 2013; Gisesa.

19 Gisesa.

20 Ibid.

21 "Kenya: Sheikh Ali - The Making of a Terrorist Com-

leadership allegedly took note of his fundamentalism and secretly appointed him as the de facto leader of its cell in Nairobi.²² In 2009, reports emerged that the MYC was recruiting youth for al-Shabab from within the mosque. Iman Ali left for Somalia in 2009, where he became leader of the al-Shabab cell in Kenya.²³ His role was to plan terrorist operations with militants in Kenya.²⁴ Members of the mosque then suspected that the committee had previously channeled funds to al-Shabab when under Iman Ali's leadership.²⁵

Iman Ali's MYC, however, had long aspired to carry out attacks in Kenya.²⁶ That aspiration gained momentum in October 2011, when Kenyan troops entered Somalia to pursue al-Shabab militants.²⁷ On January 10, 2012, nearly three months after Kenyan troops deployed to Somalia, al-Shabab announced a merger with the Kenya-based MYC.²⁸ It also designated the MYC's Iman Ali as al-Shabab's representative for Kenyan affairs.²⁹ In a statement, the MYC welcomed the development, stating there was no doubt that Iman Ali's elevation as the supreme *amir* of Kenya was recognition from the "Somali brothers who fought tirelessly against the kuffar on the importance of the Kenya mujahidin in Somalia."³⁰

The following month, in February 2012, the MYC renamed itself al-Hijra, with Iman Ali as its leader.³¹ The proposal to change the name was floated at a secret strategy meeting between the MYC

and PRMC in Majengo in Nairobi.³² According to the United Nations, the MYC chose to change their name to avoid the scrutiny of the authorities, which had taken action against MYC-affiliated names and bank accounts.³³

The MYC's official name change was not immediately noticeable on their social media outlets. Twitter and Tumblr accounts linked to the MYC continued to release statements under its old names.³⁴ The "MYC Press" Twitter account still continues to operate, posting discussions on jihad and other matters affecting Muslims. There was much activity on the Tumblr account from January to September 2013, but the last press release was issued in September 2013.

A letter from the members of the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea said in 2012 that al-Hijra continued to operate in Kenya with relative freedom, sending funds and recruits to Somalia in support of al-Shabab, while simultaneously developing plans to conduct terrorist attacks inside Kenya, deploying several operational cells for this purpose.³⁵

Pressure on Al-Hijra

Nevertheless, al-Hijra's activities, as well as those of the PRMC, have been disrupted by international and regional security services.³⁶ Moreover, a number of unexplained killings have targeted clerics considered supportive of al-Shabab and Islamist militants in Kenya.

On April 1, 2014, gunmen killed Abubakar Shariff Ahmad (also known as "Makaburi"), an extremist cleric who supported al-Shabab and may have been a member of al-Hijra, under controversial circumstances in the coastal city of Mombasa.³⁷ His death

came days after he reiterated his support for al-Shabab and defended the Westgate terrorist attack.³⁸ "I support the Westgate attackers," Makaburi told the BBC. "We as the Muslims cannot sit back and do nothing about it while our brothers and sisters get slaughtered worldwide, the Westgate attack was well deserved."³⁹ Makaburi, who faced three charges related to terrorism in December 2010, allegedly aided al-Hijra militants in procuring weapons for an attack on a church under the orders of Iman Ali in March 2014.⁴⁰

Both the United States and United Nations had designated Makaburi as a terrorist.⁴¹ The United Nations had previously described him as a leading facilitator and recruiter of young Kenyan Muslims for violent militant activities in Somalia.⁴²

Prior to Makaburi's death, unknown militants killed another key Islamist ideologue, Shaykh Aboud Rogo Mohammed, in Mombasa on August 27, 2012.⁴³ Rogo was considered an ideological leader for al-Hijra's predecessor organization, the MYC.⁴⁴ Rogo's successor, Shaykh Ibrahim Ismail, was also assassinated in a drive-by shooting in October 2013.⁴⁵

Death on Radicalism in Kenya as yet Unclear," Sabahi, April 8, 2014; Benard Sanga and Stanley Mwachanga, "Radical Cleric Sheikh Abubakar Shariff alias Makaburi Shot Dead," *Standard*, April 2, 2014.

38 Ibid.

39 "Sharif Makaburi Applauds Westgate Attackers Says It Was Well Deserved," Nairobi Exposed blog, October 8, 2013.

40 "Mombasa Court Awards Damages to Makaburi Over Unlawful Police Raid," Sabahi, March 28, 2014; Benard Sanga, "Did Nairobi Based Al Shabaab Group Order Attack on Likoni Church?" *Standard*, March 30, 2014; Sanga and Mwachanga.

41 "UN Warned of Al-Shabaab Ally's New and More Complex Operations in Kenya," *The Long War Journal*, September 23, 2013.

42 "Police Patrol Kenyan Port After Muslim Cleric's Murder," Agence France-Presse, April 2, 2014.

43 "Al-Shabaab Supporter Aboud Mohammed Rogo Killed in Kenya," BBC, August 27, 2014.

44 Christopher Anzalone, "Kenya's Muslim Youth Center and Al-Shabab's East African Recruitment," *CTC Sentinel* 5:10 (2012).

45 Boniface.

mander," *Daily Nation*, January 22, 2012.

22 Gisesa.

23 "Kenyan Picked to Head Local Al-Qaeda Wing," Capital FM, January 17, 2012.

24 Ibid.

25 Gisesa.

26 "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Pursuant to the Security Council Resolution 2002 (2011)"; "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2060 (2012)."

27 Ibid.

28 "We are Now Part of Al-Qaeda East Africa," *The Long War Journal*, February 10, 2012.

29 "Al-Shabaab Names Kenyan Leader," *Somalia Report*, January 10, 2012.

30 "Kenyan Picked to Head Local Al-Qaeda Wing."

31 "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Pursuant to the Security Council Resolution 2002 (2011)."

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 These accounts are located at www.twitter.com/MYC_Press and www.themovingcaravan.tumblr.com.

35 "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Pursuant to the Security Council Resolution 2002 (2011)."

36 "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2060 (2012)."

37 "Radical Preacher Makaburi Shot Dead," *The Star*, April 2, 2014; Bosire Boniface, "Impact of Makaburi

Conclusion

Despite these setbacks, al-Hijra appears determined to restore its efforts in Kenya. Based on the number of recent attacks in Kenya, the group has possibly been reinvigorated by fighters returning from Somalia and local recruits from East Africa. This network poses a serious threat to Kenya's domestic security, given that its members operate clandestinely. Moreover, in October 2013, UN and European officials expressed concern that al-Shabab and al-Hijra were planning future attacks employing the Westgate tactical model.⁴⁶

As stated by prominent Somalia analyst Matt Bryden in October 2013, "Al-Hijra has been under surveillance for a number of years and the Kenyan state has accumulated enough intelligence on its ideological leaders to disrupt the movement. For some reasons, there is reluctance to provide classified intelligence to the law enforcement agencies for effective prosecutions. And this ought to change."⁴⁷ In the wake of the Westgate attack and the continued violence affecting Kenya, the Kenyan government is now clearly aware of the threat posed by al-Shabab and its East African-based affiliates such as al-Hijra. Al-Shabab has managed to establish a dangerous network in Kenya, and the Kenyan government will have to concentrate resources on dismantling that network domestically.

Fredrick Nzes is a journalist based in Nairobi. He writes frequently about politics, religion and terrorism.

Recent Highlights in Political Violence

April 1, 2014 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber targeted a military convoy in Tikrit, killing five Iraqi soldiers. – *AP, April 1*

April 2, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber wearing a military uniform attacked the Interior Ministry compound in Kabul, killing six police officers. – *Time Magazine, April 2*

April 2, 2014 (EGYPT): Two bombs exploded next to a police vehicle near Cairo University. A third bomb exploded more than two hours later in the same location while a forensics team was investigating the initial bombings. A senior police officer was killed. A little known-group called Ajnad Misr (Soldiers of Egypt) claimed responsibility. – *Washington Post, April 2*

April 2, 2014 (YEMEN): Al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula militants killed eight people in a rocket and car bomb attack on an army headquarters in Aden. – *AFP, April 2*

April 2, 2014 (KENYA): Unidentified militants assassinated Abubakar Shariff Ahmed (known as Makaburi), an extremist cleric supportive of al-Shabab, in Mombasa. – *Mail Online, April 2*

April 4, 2014 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new audio message calling on Islamist militants in Syria to end their infighting. He said that "sedition" is to blame for the killing of Abu Khalid al-Suri, al-Zawahiri's representative in Syria who was assassinated in a suicide attack in February 2014. Al-Qa`ida's affiliate in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusra, blamed al-Suri's death on the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. – *Voice of America, April 5*

April 4, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): A policeman fired on two veteran foreign journalists in Afghanistan's Khost Province. Associated Press photographer Anja Niedringhaus was killed, while journalist Kathy Gannon was critically wounded. – *Radio Australia, April 5*

April 6, 2014 (PAKISTAN): Clashes between two Pakistani Taliban factions left at least 20 people dead along the border between North and South Waziristan. – *The Nation, April 8*

April 6, 2014 (EGYPT): Egyptian state media announced that authorities would charge Muhammad al-Zawahiri, al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri's brother, with setting up an "al-Qa`ida-linked terrorist group" that plotted attacks against security personnel, government installations, and members of Egypt's Christian minority. Muhammad al-Zawahiri has been in Egyptian custody since August 2013. – *Gulf News, April 6*

April 6, 2014 (BAHRAIN): A homemade bomb exploded in a car in an area where many foreigners live in Manama, but there were no reports of casualties. – *Reuters, April 7*

April 7, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in a minivan attacked a NATO convoy in Kandahar Province, although no one was seriously wounded. – *AP, April 7*

April 7, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): A roadside bomb killed at least 15 people in Kandahar Province. – *AP, April 7*

April 7, 2014 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in a vehicle attacked a police checkpoint near Samarra, killing five people. – *AP, April 7*

April 7, 2014 (SOMALIA): Two United Nations personnel were shot to death as they disembarked a plane at Galkayo Airport. The gunman was wearing a police uniform. – *BBC, April 7*

April 8, 2014 (LIBYA): The bullet-riddled body of Ali bin Taher, identified as the leader of the Islamic State Army, was found on a farm near Derna. Libyan authorities said that Taher's group is suspected of involvement in a number of assassinations of policemen and judges. – *AP, April 8*

April 9, 2014 (PAKISTAN): A bomb killed at least 21 people at a fruit and vegetable market on the outskirts of Islamabad. Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan denied responsibility. – *Wall Street Journal, April 9*

⁴⁶ "Security Agencies Worry About New Terrorist Threats in Kenya."

⁴⁷ Ibid.

April 10, 2014 (GREECE): A car bomb exploded outside a Bank of Greece building in Athens, although there were no injuries. – *al-Jazeera, April 10*

April 11, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber killed a pro-government tribal elder in Jani Khil district of Paktia Province. – *AP, April 11*

April 12, 2014 (IRAQ): A car bomb exploded in Ba`quba, killing three people. – *CNN, April 12*

April 13, 2014 (IRAQ): A car bomb exploded near a joint Iraqi army and police patrol in a busy commercial area of Mosul, killing at least 10 people. – *al-Jazeera, April 13*

April 14, 2014 (NIGERIA): Boko Haram militants kidnapped more than 200 schoolgirls in Chibok, Borno State. – *Daily Trust, April 16*

April 14, 2014 (NIGERIA): A bomb killed at least 75 people at a crowded bus station on the outskirts of Abuja, the Nigerian capital. Boko Haram claimed responsibility. – *Business Recorder, April 19; BBC, April 19*

April 15, 2014 (YEMEN): Suspected al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula militants assassinated the governor of Bayda Province as he was heading to work. – *al-Arabiya, April 15*

April 16, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban militants kidnapped a group of Afghan policemen who were traveling in civilian clothes in Wardak Province. The militants later claimed that they killed seven of them. – *New York Times, April 16*

April 16, 2014 (PAKISTAN): Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan said they were ending a six-week-old cease-fire with the Pakistani government. – *New York Times, April 16*

April 16, 2014 (YEMEN): A new jihadist video appeared on Islamist websites, showing a large gathering of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) militants in Yemen. The video shows AQAP leader Nasir al-Wahayshi greeting more than 100 followers and saying “we must eliminate the cross... the bearer of the cross is America.” – *CNN, April 16*

April 18, 2014 (GLOBAL): A spokesman for the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, accused al-Qa`ida’s leaders of deviating from “the correct path” and betraying the jihadist cause. He further said that “al-Qa`ida today is no longer a base of jihad.” The ISIL, previously known as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), was recently disowned by al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri. – *Daily Star, April 18*

April 19, 2014 (YEMEN): A U.S. drone strike killed at least nine suspected members of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula in Bayda Province. Three civilians also reportedly died in the strike. – *AP, April 19*

April 20, 2014 (YEMEN): Airstrikes killed approximately 25 suspected members of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula in a rugged mountainous region in southern Yemen. – *Voice of America, April 20*

April 20, 2014 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber detonated explosives at the entrance to Kadhim University in Baghdad, killing five people. Police reportedly shot to death three other gunmen who were part of the attack. – *RFE/RL, April 20*

April 21, 2014 (SOMALIA): A bomb tore through the car of a Somali lawmaker in Mogadishu. The lawmaker, Isaak Mohammad Rinoco, was killed by the bomb, which was reportedly planted by Islamist militants. – *Reuters, April 21*

April 23, 2014 (NETHERLANDS): The Netherlands warned that militants returning to Europe from the Syrian battlefield pose a security threat. According to the Dutch intelligence agency, “at the end of 2013, dozens of Dutch jihadists have become habituated to extreme violence and have become radicalized in their intolerant and violent ideological orientation.” The agency also said that approximately 100 Dutch citizens had traveled to Syria to join the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Jabhat al-Nusra. Twenty of those fighters have returned to the Netherlands. – *Reuters, April 23*

April 23, 2014 (KENYA): A car bomb exploded outside a police station in Nairobi, killing four people. According to Reuters, “Kenya’s security forces are

struggling to contain a surge in bomb and gun attacks that the authorities blame on the Somali Islamist militants [al-Shabab] who killed at least 67 people when they laid siege to Nairobi’s Westgate shopping mall in September.” – *Reuters, April 23*

April 24, 2014 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle attacked a police checkpoint at the entrance to Hilla, 60 miles south of Baghdad, killing at least 11 people. – *AP, April 24*

April 25, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): The Afghan Taliban’s top military commander, Mullah Abdul Qayam Zakir, resigned due to health reasons. Some analysts viewed his resignation as a sign of major splits among the Taliban leadership. – *Daily Beast, April 25*

April 25, 2014 (IRAQ): A car bomb exploded at an election rally for a Shi`a political party in Baghdad. After the explosion, a suicide bomber attacked the site. The bombs killed at least 31 people. – *AFP, April 25; CNN, April 25*

April 26, 2014 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new audio statement calling on his followers to kidnap Westerners, particularly Americans, so that they could be used as bargaining chips to free jailed jihadists. – *Reuters, April 26*

April 27, 2014 (SYRIA): Iraqi army helicopters attacked a jihadist convoy in Syria close to the Iraqi border, killing at least eight people. The attack marked the first claimed airstrike inside Syria by Iraq since the start of the uprising against the Bashar al-Assad regime in March 2011. – *al-Jazeera, April 27; Guardian, April 27*

April 28, 2014 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber detonated explosives in a Kurdish town in Diyala Province, killing 25 people. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant claimed responsibility. – *AP, April 28*

April 29, 2014 (UNITED STATES): A Nigerian citizen pleaded guilty to providing material support to al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Lawal Olaniyi Babafemi allegedly traveled from Nigeria to Yemen twice to meet with AQAP leaders, and he reportedly worked on AQAP’s *Inspire* magazine. He was

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Director, CTC

CONTACT

Combating Terrorism Center
U.S. Military Academy
607 Cullum Road, Lincoln Hall
West Point, NY 10996
Phone: (845) 667-6383
Email: sentinel@usma.edu
Web: www.ctc.usma.edu/sentinel/

* For Press Inquiries: (845) 667-6383

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extradited to the United States from Nigeria. – *News 24, April 30*

April 29, 2014 (LIBYA): A suicide bomber detonated an explosives-laden minibus outside a Libyan army camp in Benghazi, killing two people. – *Reuters, April 29*

April 29, 2014 (SYRIA): The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) reportedly crucified two men in al-Raqa, displaying their bodies in public. – *Daily Beast, April 30; Fox News, April 29*

April 29-30, 2014 (PHILIPPINES): Clashes between Philippine troops and the Abu Sayyaf Group in the southern Philippines left 14 militants and one soldier dead. – *AP, April 29*

April 30, 2014 (GLOBAL): The U.S. State Department released its annual report on terrorism. As stated by Voice of America, the report says that “losses in al-Qa`ida’s core leadership in Pakistan and Afghanistan have ‘accelerated’ the network’s decentralization. It says that has resulted in ‘more operationally autonomous’ and ‘more aggressive’ affiliates, notably in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, northwest Africa and Somalia.” – *Voice of America, April 30*

April 30, 2014 (SPAIN): Spanish authorities, with the help of French police, arrested Abdelmalek Tanem in the southern city of Almeria. Tanem, who is French-Algerian, is suspected of fighting for al-Qa`ida-linked militant groups in Syria. He is also accused of helping other Europeans cross the Turkey-Syria border to fight with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Jabhat al-Nusra. – *AFP, April 30*

April 30, 2014 (NORTH AFRICA): Mokhtar Belmokhtar, a former leader in al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb, pledged allegiance to al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri. – *AFP, April 30*