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BRIEFS

AL-QAEDA IN THE ISLAMIC MAGHREB LAUNCHES NEW ATTACK

On February 13, seven bombs ripped through Algeria, leaving six people dead. The attacks took place in the Boumerdes and Tizi Ouzou districts, about 30 miles east of Algiers, and consisted of car bombs targeting police and gendarmerie stations (*el-Watan*, February 14). The attacks are significant since they were claimed by Qaedat al-Jihad in the Arab Maghreb Countries, or al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb, which was formed (or renamed) recently and is led by the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC). Shortly after the explosions, a spokesman from al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb stated that, "We declare our responsibility for this morning's operation, which was carried out at 0430 local time. The operation consisted of a series of attacks using booby-trapped cars against seven centers of the national gendarmerie and the Algerian police" (*al-Jazeera TV*, February 13). The operation was well planned since the explosions occurred nearly simultaneously. This spectacular opening attack by the newly named/formed group is raising concern that similar operations are in the works not only in North Africa, but also in Europe where the GSPC is known to have a number of operatives. By aligning itself formally with al-Qaeda, these operatives may now be utilized to target not only French and Algerian interests, but also those states that are considered allied with the United States. According to the February 1 issue of *Terrorism Monitor*, "By consolidating the Maghrebi groups, al-Qaeda has, in effect, created the conduit through which jihadis can migrate among Iraq, North Africa and potentially Europe, while also establishing the organizational structure in the Maghreb to pursue the

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The Terrorism Focus is a fortnightly complement to Jamestown's Terrorism Monitor, providing detailed and timely analysis of developments for policymakers and analysts, informing them of the latest trends in the War on Terror.

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global jihad.” It is believed that fighters now part of al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb are hiding in the forests of Boumerdes and Tizi Ouzou (al-Jazeera TV, February 13).

JORDAN CHARGES 17 FOR RECRUITING FIGHTERS FOR IRAQ

The attorney general of Jordan’s State Security Court charged 17 people with recruiting fighters to attack Americans in Iraq, along with a number of other charges such as possessing and selling illegal weapons (*Jordan Times*, February 13). Five of the defendants were charged in absentee since they have not been apprehended by authorities. According to the charges, the defendants recruited several people in Jordan to fight in Iraq; one of the recruits was willing to conduct a suicide attack (*Jordan Times*, February 13). The charge sheet reads: “The defendants joined training camps in Lebanon and Syria and some armed themselves with machine guns to attack Jordanian security forces while crossing the Jordanian-Syrian border illegally.” Recruiting operations for Iraq appear to exist in most Middle Eastern countries, including states in North Africa and in Europe.

Somalia’s Islamist Leadership: Where Are They Now?

Bombings, shootings and mortar attacks continue in Somalia’s capital of Mogadishu and the southern port city of Kismayo, as Somali Islamists engage Ethiopian occupation forces. Many Islamist leaders took refuge in Yemen’s capital of Sanaa, where they were joined by Islamic Courts Union (ICU) second-in-command Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmad after his transfer from detention in Kenya (26September.net, February 10). A Yemeni newspaper quoted the sheikh as saying that his release from Kenya was obtained after the conclusion of negotiations with the United States over the return of 15 U.S. Marines (including four wounded), who were allegedly captured by the Islamists in the jungles of south Somalia during a U.S. mission in December. The Marines were allegedly held in the Ras Kamboni region near the Kenyan border and on the coast of the Indian Ocean. A Qatari newspaper claimed to have confirmation of the incident from unnamed Arab and Western diplomats (*al-Sharqa*, January 26). Sheikh Sharif claimed his release and transfer to Yemen were part of the conditions for turning the prisoners over to U.S. authorities, with Yemen promising to return the Islamist leader to U.S. forces in

Nairobi if the release of the Marines did not occur (*al-Nedaa*, February 8; Shabelle Media Network, February 8). While in the custody of Kenya’s National Security Intelligence Service, Sheikh Sharif met several times with Washington’s point man for Somalia, U.S. Ambassador to Kenya Michael Ranneberger, reportedly to negotiate the release of the captives (*al-Khaleej*, February 1).

The Pentagon issued strong denials that any U.S. troops had been captured in southern Somalia (AllAfrica.com, January 26). No independent verification or evidence was offered by the Islamists to substantiate the reports of captured Marines, and though reports of the alleged capture were carried widely in African and Arab news media, Western news sources ignored the entire story.

In the last few weeks, many Islamist fugitives have been captured in the difficult terrain of Somalia’s frontier with Kenya, where local security forces are aided by detachments from Britain’s SAS. ICU sources claim that the number of detainees is being underreported, and that many of the prisoners being transferred to Ethiopian hands are slated for secret executions (Qaadisiya.com, February 7). Ethiopia reports that as many as 4,000 Islamists were killed during last December’s invasion. According to Ethiopian Premier Meles Zenawi, ICU leader Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys (accused by the United States of ties to al-Qaeda) is still active in the Somali/Kenyan border region, together with leading Ogaden separatist Hassan Abdullah al-Turki. Bloody papers belonging to ICU extremist Adan Hashi Ayro (a veteran of the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan) were discovered after a U.S. gunship attack, but the notorious militia leader appears to have survived (Shabelle Media Network, February 5). Jendayi Frazer, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for African affairs, stated that it was Washington’s belief that fugitive Islamist leaders might reorganize in Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Eritrea, describing the latter as “a source of regional instability” (*Financial Times*, January 31).

Although the United States, the European Union, Ethiopia and many other countries are urging the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) to undertake national reconciliation talks that would include Islamists like Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmad, TFG Prime Minister Ali Muhammad Gedi has stated the government’s firm opposition to talks with any Islamist leaders, whether moderate or radical (Shabelle Media Network, February 13). TFG President Abdullahi Yusuf also opposes talks, describing Sheikh Sharif as a leading member of “the axis of evil.” According to the president, it was the Islamists and not the warlords who were “responsible for

the instability and destruction of the country” (Shabelle Media Network, February 5). A reconciliation conference is planned to go ahead in Mogadishu, although without an Islamist presence it is difficult to see with just whom the TFG intends to reconcile.

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Sawt al-Jihad Calls for Attacks on Western Energy Interests

Since Osama bin Laden first spoke about the necessity of targeting the oil industry in order to damage the U.S. economy, there has been a clear shift in al-Qaeda’s operational strategy. Moreover, just months after al-Qaeda deputy leader Ayman al-Zawahiri called on his fellow mujahideen to target oil supplies, al-Qaeda operatives attacked the Abqaiq oil refinery, one of the largest in the world, in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia (<http://www.almahdy.net>, December 10, 2005). Even though the price of oil increased by over \$2 a barrel after the attack, counter-terrorism officials and Saudi Aramco representatives considered the attack unsuccessful due to the effective security response at the refinery. Nevertheless, the 30th issue of al-Qaeda’s publication *Sawt al-Jihad*, released in January, gives a different account of the attack and the extent of al-Zawahiri’s provocation against the global oil industry. Al-Zawahiri’s call to target the oil industry on an international level was translated by jihadi forum participants into Italian, French and was made available for download on various Islamist websites, one of which is <http://www.lahdah.com>.

Contrary to statements made by officials and observers of al-Qaeda’s Abqaiq refinery attack, who claimed that al-Qaeda’s loss of tactical and strategic capabilities were evident in the operation, an interview in *Sawt al-Jihad* with one of the operatives that participated in the attack, Badir Abdullah al-Himaidi, gave a different account of the incident. Al-Himaidi, who survived the attack and is presently believed to be with al-Qaeda in Iraq, reiterated that the attack was carried out successfully by “Osama bin Laden’s platoon” on the orders of Amir Osama bin Laden. According to the interview, the platoon was comprised of seven mujahideen who fled the scene unharmed, except for the two suicide attackers that drove the two explosives-laden vehicles into the refinery and took out the control room and sections of the oil pipelines.

Another article in the issue, written by Adeeb al-Bassam, enumerates the successful aspects of the Abqaiq attack, stating that the oil industry has long been on al-Qaeda’s target list as opposed to what some al-Qaeda experts label as a new trend in al-Qaeda’s operations. Al-Bassam highlights the importance of oil for the G-8 countries since the secure flow of oil is the lifeline for the industrialized world. Furthermore, al-Bassam criticizes President George W. Bush’s latest State of the Union speech where he alludes to the insignificance of Middle Eastern oil for the United States. Al-Bassam calls this claim a lie that is intended for political consumption and has been repeatedly used by other U.S. presidents in the past, especially Jimmy Carter who promised to completely halt the import of Middle Eastern oil by the year 1990. In fact, according to al-Bassam, U.S. oil imports increased by 60 percent since then.

In addition, the article provides facts and figures illustrating the dependence of the U.S. economy on oil and the possibility that the United States might try to increase supplies from Canada, Venezuela and Mexico. Al-Bassam, therefore, recaps the directives of Osama bin Laden to target oil industries including wells, pipelines, export platforms, fuel tankers and anything that will affect oil supply routes to the United States. These attacks are to be on an international scale, and thus should include the targeting of facilities in Canada and Venezuela, for example.

Past experience tells us that al-Qaeda operatives, who are sturdy adherents of Salafi-Jihadi ideology, pledge allegiance to bin Laden and his directives. Eventually, whether decentralized or directly linked to al-Qaeda, terrorist cells will try to carry out bin Laden’s orders.

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Yemen Accuses Iran of Meddling in its Internal Affairs

In late January, a new round of fighting broke out between the *Shabab al-Muminayn* (The Believing Youth) and Yemeni forces in the northern governorate of Sa’dah. Government sources put the combined death toll at nearly 100, although the actual numbers are likely far higher. Like much of what surrounds the lengthy conflict, the circumstances that led to this latest series of clashes

are lost in a maze of half-truths and disinformation spread by both sides. Yet the spark seems to have been the decision by a group of roughly 50 Jews to seek refuge in a local hotel, where they would be protected from the Shabab. The government claims that the Shabab were harassing the Jews, while the Shabab counter with allegations that the Jews were selling wine to Muslims. In truth, little was needed to reignite the conflict, which has been raging since June 2004. If it had not been this incident, another excuse would have been found to justify the renewed fighting.

Yemen has also sought to strengthen regional and international opinion against the Shabab by stoking fears of Iranian involvement in the conflict. The Shabab, which are known in the official press as the al-Houthi rebels—an insulting term that is derived from the name of the group’s first leader, Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi, who was killed in September 2004—are comprised of Zaydi Muslims, a Shiite sect that has traditionally been closer to Sunni Islam than it has to the Twelver Shiism that is practiced in Iran.

Yemen has made similar allegations in the past, but given the current mood of anti-Shiite feelings among the country’s neighbors in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), it has stressed its claims much more during the past few weeks than it has in previous years. Part of this is a desire by Yemen to link its internal problems to regional issues in the hopes of securing financial aid.

Yemen has long been aware that any steps toward possible entry into the GCC and most aid from its member countries are contingent upon security issues. Not surprisingly, the current accusations were first made public during President Ali Abdullah Salih’s trip to the United Arab Emirates, where he was lobbying for more aid following last November’s donor conference in London. The charges were given more weight in the region following an al-Jazeera story that asked whether Iranian involvement in the conflict was real or imaginary (al-Jazeera, February 6). Days later, Yemen’s Supreme Defense Council met under Salih’s leadership and threatened to reduce ties with Iran and Libya to their barest essentials if the two countries did not cease meddling in Yemen’s internal affairs (al-Jazeera, February 11).

Yemen has asked Libya to extradite Yahya al-Houthi, the brother of both the current leader of the Shabab, ‘Abd al-Malik al-Houthi, as well as its founder, Hussein al-Houthi (al-Jazeera, February 16). Salih has also issued the third, and what he says is the final, 48-hour ultimatum to the

rebels to surrender their weapons and turn themselves over to security forces (*al-Hayat*, February 18). Yet, like most of the previous mediation attempts and truce negotiations, this latest demand will likely be ignored.

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New Sufi Group Joins the Iraqi Insurgency

Late last year, The Jamestown Foundation reported on a new insurgent group comprised of Qadiri Sufi insurgents calling themselves the Battalions of Sheikh ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani (*Terrorism Focus*, September 19, 2006). In September 2006, it was somewhat of an anomaly. At the time, it was only the second Sufi insurgent group operating in Iraq, and reports of Sufis joining the insurgency were dismissed by some as either inaccurate or abnormalities (the first group was the Sufi Jihadi Squadrons of Sheikh ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani). In the early years of the Iraq conflict, Sufi orders refused to participate in the violence, causing militant Salafi groups to attack them in retaliation for not participating or as a means to spark greater sectarian violence. Adherents of Sufi orders were perceived as victims, not perpetrators of violence in Iraq. Many cooperated with coalition troops. The ranks of Sufi insurgents, however, now appear to be growing.

Early this month, another Sufi insurgent group declared itself by posting a video on January 17 of what it claimed to be operations against coalition troops. “The Army of the Men of the Naqshbandi Order” released a video that showed operations carried out by the group against coalition forces. The video displayed attacks against humvees and showed insurgents firing off mortar rounds (<http://www.islammemo.com/cc>, December 30, 2006).

The Naqshbandi order is one of the largest and most influential Sufi Muslim orders. It is named after its founder, Baha al-din Naqshband. It is known as the only Sufi order to trace its spiritual lineage to the Prophet Muhammad through Abu Bakr, the first caliph. Most other orders trace their lineage to Ali ibn Abu Talib, the prophet’s cousin, son-in-law and fourth caliph.

The Army of the Men of the Naqshbandi Order also issued a statement along with the video posting explaining their decision to join the insurgency. Citing growing sectarianism and injustice committed by the “despicable Bush...and the

surrogate sectarian government,” the group declared its resolve to fight against the “racist crimes” of the “Safawi” power, a reference to the old Shiite dynasty. They were clear in stating their connection to the wider Iraqi insurgency. Part of their statement reads, “The Army of the Men of the Naqshbandi Order...fights the occupying infidels and their surrogates...in order to prove to the whole world that the mujahideen are different groups of Iraqis and are not, as portrayed by our enemies, foreigners...different formations and groups took shape and increased over time in numbers and equipment contrary to what has been declared by our enemies” (<http://www.islammemo.com/cc>, December 30, 2006).

They blame the current government for handing Iraq over to the infidels and using the media to manipulate their legitimate resistance as terrorism—all common complaints of Iraqi insurgent groups. They criticize the Iraq Study Group report and lament the execution of Saddam Hussein, who they term as the “great president, our mujahid leader.” They also made clear their nationalist character by stating “our hands never got smeared with Iraqi blood. This army will continue to fight the infidel occupiers...until we expel the last infidel and those sectarian surrogates who assist their Zionist masters in carrying out their plans in attacking Islam and tearing apart our beloved Iraq” (<http://www.islammemo.com/cc>, December 30, 2006).

Sufi fighters have similar motivations for joining the insurgency as other components of Iraq’s conflict—discrimination, loss of power, status and unemployment, as well as revenge and the suffering of various indecencies such as detentions. In fact, the imam of the Naqshbandi al-Rabat Mosque in Samarra, Sheikh Abaas Fadil, was detained by U.S. forces in March of last year. He was later released, but it was a humiliation for their leader.

Nevertheless, while Sufis may share similar political motivations for joining the insurgency, they do not have the same ideological or religious opposition to the presence of foreign troops and rule by a Shiite majority as do Sunnis. They oppose such circumstances only in so far as they lead to political troubles for their followers. They do not share the same ideological and religious aversion to Shiite rule in Iraq as more religiously motivated Sunnis.

Many Salafi-Jihadis who make up the global Islamist resistance have the same aversion to Sufi strains in Islam as they do Shiism. The precursor to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s group, Ansar al-Islam, had attacked Sufi shrines and tombs of Naqshbandi orders in Kurdistan. It seems,

however, that this may be changing. This is certainly the case in Iraq where accomplishing military and political victory over the struggling Iraqi government trumps all else.

Abu Musab al-Suri, a top al-Qaeda strategist now in custody, has Sufi family origins and has displayed no anti-Sufi sentiments. Other militant Islamic thinkers, such as Abu Azzam al-Ansari, in his work “Al-Qaeda is Moving Towards Africa,” published in the no. 7 issue of *Sada al-Jihad*, writes that “working with Sufis is easier than working with any other trend, such as Shiite or communist.”

There could also be circumstantial reasons for why Sufis have joined in with Sunni and Salafi groups in insurgent cooperation. Former Iraqi Vice President Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, widely regarded as one of the principal organizers behind the insurgency, is himself a practicing member of a Sufi order. A militant branch of the Kasnazani order was involved with al-Duri. It is possible that these connections had something to do with bringing certain Sufi orders into the fold.

Even without this personal factor, members of Sufi orders are participating in the Iraq insurgency in increasing numbers. This is problematic for the country, but it does not mean that Sufis are participating on a significant scale in the worldwide militant Islamic movement, despite the current thinking of some al-Qaeda members on the subject. Even in Iraq, members of Sufi orders have not signed up wholesale. The very group that was associated with al-Duri, the Kasnazani order, is mostly pro-Iraqi government. The mainstream of the Kasnazani order (which is itself part of the larger Qadiri order) and its leadership is involved in legitimate political activity, such as running a political party and a national newspaper. The Iraqi government and coalition troops must take steps to ensure that more Sufi orders participate politically rather than violently, since the latter increasingly seems to be the case.

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