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John F. Kennedy International Airport

Spotlight on Trinidad and Tobago’s Jamaat al-Muslimeen

By Chris Zambelis

The recent allegations of a foiled plot to attack New York City’s John F. Kennedy International Airport by suspected Islamist extremists with ties to the Caribbean have raised concerns about the spread of radical Islam among the region’s sizeable Muslim community. Early reports link the suspects to Trinidad and Tobago’s *Jamaat al-Muslimeen* (Muslim Association, JAM), a radical Islamist group with a history of political militancy and violence.

The Suspects

Russell M. Defreitas, 63, a U.S. citizen and resident of New York City who was born in Guyana, was once employed at the airport as an airline cargo handler. He is a Sunni Muslim convert of Afro-Guyanese descent. As the alleged mastermind behind the conspiracy, Defreitas has not held a steady job since 1995 and relied on social security payments and working odd jobs to survive. He had only \$50.70 in his name at the time of his arrest (*Trinidad & Tobago Newsday*, June 7). His alleged accomplices included Afro-Guyanese Muslim convert Abdel Kadir, 55, born Michael Seaforth. Kadir converted to Sunni and later Shiite Islam and served as an imam in Guyana. A civil engineer by training, he once served as a member of Guyana’s parliament and the mayor of the town of Linden. Kadir also studied theology in Iran in the 1990s, where he met and befriended Muhammed Hassan Abrahemi, an Iranian Shiite cleric who would later head Guyana’s International Islamic College of Advanced Studies. Abrahemi made headlines in Guyana when he was abducted and murdered in 2004 (*Terrorism Monitor*, July 27, 2006).

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Kadir was reportedly preparing to attend an Islamic conference in Iran at the time of his arrest (*Stabroek*, June 3).

Abdel Nur, 57, born Compton Eversley, is a Sunni Muslim convert of Afro-Guyanese descent who worked odd jobs and battled drug addiction. He was deported from Canada in 1982 after serving time for drug trafficking. Nur was also deported from the United States based on similar charges in the late 1980s (*Stabroek*, June 5; *Stabroek*, June 8). The fourth suspect, Afro-Trinidadian Kareem Ibrahim, also known as Winston Kingston and Amir Kareem, is a native of Trinidad and Tobago and a Shiite imam. Ibrahim, 56, was initially a convert to Sunni Islam, but later adopted Shiite Islam in the 1970s. He also operated an Islamic bookstore (*Trinidad & Tobago Express*, June 3). He is reported to suffer from severe claustrophobia, a condition that has prevented him from flying since 1979 (*Guyana Chronicle*, June 17).

By all accounts, the suspected plotters, whose ages range in the 50s and 60s and include Sunnis and Shiites, do not fit the typical profile of capable terrorist operatives. For example, those who know Defreitas and Nur describe them as “ganja smoking” loners who were often unkempt, unstable and lacked the means to support themselves, let alone create a plot of this magnitude (*Trinidad & Tobago Express*, June 6). The alleged plan was also nowhere near operational or technically feasible. In ridiculing the suspects, one Trinidadian commentator dubbed them the “jokey foursome” (*Trinidad & Tobago Express*, June 10).

The Jamaat al-Muslimeen Connection

Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that Defreitas harbored resentment toward the United States stemming from his opposition to U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, indicating some intent on his part to act. The suspected plotters did not look to associates in the Middle East or South Asia for support. Instead, they are alleged to have sought financial assistance from the obscure Trinidad-based radical Sunni Islamist group known as Jamaat al-Muslimeen.

Observers who have followed JAM’s activities over the years were surprised to hear that the group was implicated in the plot. Reports that the suspects intended to reach out to JAM’s leadership to include a meeting with the group’s leader, Imam Yasin Abu Bakr, who is currently awaiting the start of his high-profile

trial in Port of Spain for charges of sedition, terrorism and other crimes, also baffled regional observers and authorities. Trinidadian Police Commissioner Trevor Paul announced that there was no information linking JAM to the alleged plot, although there is evidence that some of the suspects passed through JAM circles at one point (*Trinidad & Tobago Express*, June 6).

Despite the recent charges and the group’s track record of political militancy and violence, which includes terrorist attacks in Trinidad, there is no evidence to suggest that JAM has ever attempted an attack outside of Trinidad, let alone an attack against the United States. JAM, however, has been known to maintain a presence outside of Trinidad, including in the United States, in what appears to be an effort to facilitate its criminal activities (*Trinidad & Tobago Newsday*, June 10). There is also no evidence linking JAM to al-Qaeda or other international terrorist organizations. The involvement of Shiite Muslims among the suspects has raised questions about a possible Iranian link but, again, there is no evidence of an Iranian connection as well.

The outspoken JAM Social and Welfare Officer Kala Akii Bua strongly denied any links to the alleged terror plan, calling it an international conspiracy hatched by the FBI and the Trinidadian government to tarnish the image of his organization. In an apparent reference to the group’s violent reputation, he stated that “Japan and America were enemies...We have moved on. We turned a new corner.” Akii Bua acknowledged that suspect Abdel Nur prayed at a JAM-led mosque and stayed at the home of a JAM member (*Trinidad Guardian*, June 7). He denied, however, that Nur ever met with senior JAM leaders: “Some people will say they meet Santa Claus.” He added that JAM does not “believe it is proper to strike at the United States” (*Trinidad & Tobago Express*, June 7). Akii Bua additionally acknowledged knowing Kareem Ibrahim, who previously associated with JAM before adopting Shiite Islam (*Trinidad & Tobago Newsday*, June 7). In another curious twist in the case, Kadir and Abu Bakr are reported to know each other from their time studying together at the University of the West Indies. They have been accused of being business associates, but no further evidence has surfaced confirming this claim (*Trinidad & Tobago Express*, June 6).

Background

JAM was founded in the 1980s by Yasin Abu Bakr, an Afro-Trinidadian Muslim convert born Lenox Philip and a former police officer. The organization has traditionally

been comprised primarily of Afro-Trinidadian Muslim converts to Sunni Islam. Its ideology and discourse combine a mix of the most extreme fringes of pan-African nationalism and black identity politics with Islamist rhetoric and symbolism. JAM has portrayed itself through the years as an advocate for all Afro-Trinidadians, including non-Muslims. Afro-Trinidadian Muslim converts in Trinidad represent only a tiny fraction of the larger Muslim minority community, which is dominated by East Indians, a frequent target of JAM's ire over the years. Understanding the nuances of Trinidad's complex ethnic and racially-divided society and political arena is crucial to understanding the emergence of JAM and its allure among its narrow following (*Terrorism Monitor*, March 9, 2006).

In 1990, the 65 year-old Abu Bakr ordered more than 100 of his followers to raid Trinidad's Red House (National Parliament) in an attempt to overthrow the government in a violent coup over grievances related to a property dispute, social justice, poverty and state corruption. JAM took hostage Prime Minister A.N.R. Robinson, who was shot and wounded amid the ensuing chaos, and most of his cabinet. The group also took over Trinidad's then sole national television station and one of two radio stations. The crisis lasted for five days, plunging the capital Port of Spain into violence and disarray. The coup attempt led to scores of deaths and casualties and tens of millions of dollars in damages. JAM surrendered to authorities after a period of negotiations led to a settlement that resulted in an amnesty for the organization. The details of the amnesty remain a point of contention to this day, as subsequent governments have pursued legal action against Abu Bakr and JAM members for their role in committing violence and destroying public property.

Since the coup attempt, Abu Bakr and other prominent JAM members have been implicated in an array of crimes, including narcotics and arms smuggling, extortion, murder and kidnapping for ransom. JAM has also been linked to crime in the United States. JAM member Louis Akhtab Haneef, a former resident of Pompano Beach, Florida who is also known as Louis Sinclair Coleman, purchased most of the weapons used by his associates during the 1990 coup attempt at gun shows and shops in southern Florida and exported them to Trinidad [1]. JAM member Olive Enyahooma El, also known as Clive Lancelot Small, was convicted in Miami in 2004 on charges that he attempted to smuggle automatic weapons and silencers from Florida to Trinidad in 2001. JAM member Keith Andre Glaude was arrested during a sting

operation in Fort Lauderdale in 2001 for attempting to purchase automatic weapons and silencers for export to JAM in Trinidad (*Trinidad & Tobago Newsday*, June 10).

Although JAM has maintained a lower profile during the last few years due to increased government pressure and a series of high-profile arrests of its members, the group has remained a vocal player in Trinidadian politics. Trinidadians, however, continue to characterize JAM as a criminal organization more than a religious or political one.

Conclusion

Authorities in the United States and Caribbean need to remain vigilant regarding the threat of terrorism in the region. There is, however, little evidence to indicate that radical Islamist ideologies are resonating among Muslims in the Caribbean. The alleged JFK plot appears to be an isolated incident concocted by a group of aging amateurs who may have harbored some aspirations to act out their grievances through violence, but boasted little in terms of operational capabilities and resources. While many observers point to the presence of JAM in Trinidad as proof of an emerging terrorist threat to the United States in the region, these assessments fail to take into account JAM's history of acting almost exclusively in the Trinidadian context.

To date, the most pressing security concerns in the Caribbean remain drug and arms smuggling, organized and financial crime and human trafficking, not radical Islam. Nevertheless, the institutional weakness, endemic corruption, poverty and lawlessness characteristic of much of the Caribbean can, in theory, make the region susceptible to terrorist infiltration.

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Notes

1. Loren Berger and Denis Henigan, "Guns and Terror," Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence, 2001.

Islamist Terrorism and Energy Sector Security in Algeria

By Geoff D. Porter

Despite the fact that its oil production is leveling off and serious questions surround projected increases in gas production, exogenous developments and domestic efforts are serving to make Algeria an increasingly important oil and gas supplier to European and U.S. markets. Simultaneously, the risks posed by Islamist terrorism seem to be escalating and reversing the diminishing trend that characterized the last four years. Nevertheless, since the beginning of the resurgence in terrorist activity during the last six months and the growing significance of the Algerian energy sector, there have only been three attacks on the energy sector itself—two on employees of foreign firms and one on a domestic gas pipeline. Considering the thousands of kilometers of pipelines and more than a dozen foreign oil and gas firms operating in the country, it is surprising that Islamist terrorists have not targeted Algeria's energy sector more aggressively.

For the past six years, it appeared that Algeria's security situation was improving and that the European Union's and the United States' growing reliance on Algerian oil and gas would not be jeopardized by the country's Islamist insurgency. Building on his passage of the popular Civil Concord general amnesty in 1999, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika had seemingly gained the upper hand by 2002 against the Islamist insurgency that destabilized the country throughout the 1990s, and he had begun to push out of politics the members of the military who were suspected of manipulating Islamist violence. His re-election in 2004 was largely due to the perception that he was personally responsible for bringing an end to the Islamist threat in Algeria. In fact, a member of the Movement for a Peaceful Society, the government-sanctioned Islamist party, said in a private conversation with this author in November 2004, "Thank God, Bouteflika brought peace to Algeria."

The struggle against Islamist insurgents has continued, but only one group—the former Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), now known as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)—remains active, and its numbers are severely depleted, with estimates ranging from 250 to 500 members in contrast with the thousands of fighters distributed across at least three groups during the height of the conflict between 1994-

1996. According to a high-ranking police official during an interview with the author on May 20, the police and the military have, in addition to reducing their numbers, confined the terrorists to the mountainous areas in Boumerdes province "where even the French couldn't go when they were fighting the Algerian mujahideen" during the War of Independence. The official also said that the gendarmerie and the military have currently adopted new counter-terrorism methods, including deploying units to live in the mountains for extended periods in order to combat AQIM rather than trying to launch forays from regional military bases.

Nevertheless, since October 2006, terrorism in Algeria, and around Algiers in particular, has become more prevalent. On October 30, 2006, bombs exploded in front of police stations in the Algiers suburbs. This was followed by a December 2006 attack on a van carrying employees of Brown and Root-Condor—a Kellogg, Brown and Root-Sonatrach joint venture. More bombs exploded in Algeria's Kabylia region in February this year, followed by coordinated attacks on the Algerian military on February 28. Throughout the winter and spring of 2007, Algerian soldiers clashed with Islamist terrorists, causing the highest number of casualties on both sides in recent years. On April 11, violence reached a new level with the simultaneous attacks on a police station in an Algiers suburb and the prime minister's office in the center of the city. The last attack received international attention and raised questions about the extent to which the security situation in Algeria is deteriorating. At the same time, Algeria's increasing centrality as a European and U.S. energy supplier makes the threat of a continued increase in terrorism all the more worrisome.

While global oil markets correctly anticipated that Algerian crude production is not likely to increase significantly in the next three years—with 2010 crude production targets scaled back from two million barrels per day (bpd) to 1.4-1.6 million bpd, or only slightly higher than the current 1.37 million bpd average—the country is unlikely to become any less important to EU oil markets. In fact, supply disruptions in the Niger Delta have actually increased the importance of Algerian production because traders are increasingly turning to Algerian Saharan blend (45° API and 0.1% sulfur) as a more reliable alternative to Nigerian Bonny Light (37° API and less than 0.1% sulfur). Algerian gas is also becoming more important to EU markets as they look to Algeria as an alternative to Russian gas and to British and U.S. markets as they expand the use of LNG

in power generation. Algeria-piped gas supplies 30% of the EU's gas needs, which is only 10% shy of Russian gas and 5% more than Norwegian; however, within certain countries Algerian supply exceeds Russian imports. For example, Italy currently imports 37% of its gas from Algeria and it is expected to import as much as 60% from Algeria by 2010. Algerian LNG supply to the UK's Isle of Grain began in 2005 and is expected to grow during the next three or four years to meet 20% of the UK's gas needs. Although Algeria only supplies 3.6% of the U.S. LNG imports, this figure could increase in coming years if the United States moves away from coal-powered electricity generation.

Energy Pipelines Largely Secure

Despite the increase in terrorist activity, however, Algeria's energy sector is largely secure. The state has long recognized that the sector is the country's economic lifeline and has taken steps to protect it. Pipelines are regularly monitored and key hydrocarbons and petrochemical facilities are heavily policed. Algeria's geography further mitigates the likelihood of an attack on wellheads. Unlike southern Iraq or Nigeria's delta states where insurgents attack those countries' important oil sectors in order to call attention to their grievances and advance their political agenda, the key oil and gas producing areas in Algeria are in the south of the country and are far from population centers. The Interior Ministry requires a special permit to travel throughout oil and gas producing areas. Furthermore, any effort to carry out an attack on oil and gas producing facilities would likely result in the deaths of the assailants. Most facilities are in remote areas and any attack would prompt an immediate government riposte that would likely kill the attackers before they were able to retreat to safe territory. According to an employee of a privately-owned aviation company that runs charter flights from Algiers to Hassi Messaoud (Algeria's southern energy hub), the Algerian military would likely launch helicopter gun ships within half an hour of an attack, and they would likely be able to track down invaders in Algeria's southern deserts before they could escape.

In addition, foreign energy firms operating in Algeria have instituted rigorous security protocols in order to reduce exposure to a possible attack. An employee of an independent international oil, gas and mining company with assets in Algeria, who asked to remain anonymous because he is not permitted to speak with outside analysts, remarked that although Algeria has lost "five

years of security improvements" in recent months, he did not see the deterioration of security as curtailing his company's activities. Instead, his and other foreign firms have minimized their staff and prohibited non-essential personnel from residing in-country. Many foreign firms are taking the additional precaution of minimizing travel to Algiers and are flying directly to the southern energy hub of Hassi Messaoud. The head of a Canadian oil firm recently flew directly from London to Hassi Messaoud in order to evaluate the status of his company's assets and bypassed Algiers entirely. When foreign firm employees are required to travel to Algiers to meet with the Energy Ministry or Sonatrach, they stay in fortified compounds and travel through the city in two-car convoys.

Vulnerabilities Remain

Despite these precautions, Algeria's energy sector is still vulnerable. In particular, oil and LNG must eventually be lifted at Algeria's ports. Algeria has plans to rehabilitate and upgrade its ports, but with the exception of Bejaia, most Algerian ports are still closely linked to their surrounding urban environments, which make securing their perimeters difficult. This is particularly true in Algiers, Oran, Arzew and Skikda. Complicating port security is the fact that Algiers and Skikda are notoriously home to supporters of Islamist terrorists, and the current head of the ex-GSPC, Abdelmalek Droukhal, has historic ties to Skikda—where Algeria's main gas liquefaction installation is located.

The previously mentioned police official acknowledged that he does not understand why the Islamists have not tried more rigorously to target energy sector installations. He surmised that his forces' efforts to disrupt the Islamists' bomb-making capabilities have limited attacks in general, but admitted that he did not entirely comprehend the Islamists' rationale for staying away from coastal energy installations. According to the official, police operations have undermined bomb-making capabilities, both through seizing bomb materials and killing or arresting technicians. The official asserted that the Islamists are able to make numerous small bombs but have limited "large" bomb resources. In his estimation, the Islamists are likely trying to conserve their resources for sensational operations similar to the April 11 attack on the prime minister's office.

A possible split within the former GSPC between members who want to bring the group's objectives into line with the broader global al-Qaeda movement and those who want to retain the group's "Algerianist" orientation

may also be complicating the Islamists' planning capabilities. The previously mentioned police official suggested that the GSPC's January 28 announcement that it was to be called AQIM reflected a schism within the group. Apparently, Droudkal is pushing for a closer alliance with al-Qaeda and an expansion of the group's activities beyond Algeria. Other members, however, are insisting that the organization continue its struggle specifically against the Algerian government in response to the government's cancellation of the 1991 legislative elections that the Islamic Salvation Front was slated to win. While the al-Qaeda elements within the organization would likely prefer to attack energy installations and foreigners, the "Algerianist" elements likely prioritize targeting government institutions. To the degree that the different factions within the group cooperate, they likely focus their limited resources on targets that will satisfy the demands of each faction, which more often than not means government personnel and institutions.

Nevertheless, an Algerian reporter employed by an international news agency in Algiers said in a discussion on May 22 that he believes that Islamists unquestionably intend to target the energy sector and that it is only a matter of time before they do so. If the Islamists are able to reconstitute their bomb-making capabilities to the point where they can satisfy both the interests of the al-Qaeda supporters and the "Algerianist" fighters, then both the government and the energy sector will be at risk. For the moment, however, the police and military efforts to counter terrorist activity seem likely to succeed in limiting the Islamists' ability to attack the energy sector. This, in conjunction with strict energy company security protocols, ensures Algeria's ongoing ability to be a key energy supplier and minimizes the likelihood of supply disruption.

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Battleground Somalia: America's Uncertain Front in the War on Terror

By Andrew McGregor

On June 14, Somalia's National Reconciliation Conference (NRC) was postponed for the second time. It is now possible that the conference will never be held. The NRC has been long viewed by the United States, the European Union and others as Somalia's last chance for peace and security, but the postponement will compel the United States to re-examine its long-term policy in Somalia. For external consumption, Somalia's new Transitional Federal Government (TFG) describes the Somali conflict as a struggle against international terrorism; in reality, much of the fighting is due to historic animosity between some of Somalia's largest clans. In Mogadishu, the Darod-dominated TFG is engaged in a running battle against the Hawiye clan, which were the largest backers of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), the Islamist government expelled from power by last December's Ethiopian invasion.

The United States has released funding for the reconciliation conference while urging the TFG to reach out to the banned Islamists to encourage their participation. The TFG offered the Islamists a chance to register as elected clan representatives, but with no assurances of security. Islamist leaders, who claim the true aim of the conference is to "legalize the Ethiopian occupation of Somalia," responded with demands for a neutral venue and the full withdrawal of Ethiopian troops (Goobjoog, May 24). In the meantime, roadside bombs explode daily and an intensive campaign of assassinations is taking a heavy toll on Somali leaders. Former ICU leaders are attempting to unite various opposition factions in a national movement for the liberation of Somalia from "foreign occupation" (*The East African* [Nairobi], June 18). The insurgency is also placing great pressure on formerly peaceful Somali territories like Puntland and Somaliland.

U.S. Assault in Puntland

The TFG has given U.S. forces the "green light" to carry out counter-terrorist operations inside Somalia, such as the recent attack on Islamists in Puntland (a semi-autonomous region in northeastern Somalia). Set up in 1998 as a self-governing refuge from the chaos

prevailing in the rest of Somalia, Puntland's single-party government has become increasingly authoritarian in recent years as it tries to prevent political Islam from taking hold. Public unrest is growing as the national treasury grows mysteriously dry, services are curtailed and soldiers and civil servants go unpaid. The administration recently signed several natural resource exploration deals with Western and Arab companies without public consultation.

In the last days of May, the Puntland regional administration announced that two speedboats carrying 30 to 35 al-Qaeda "terrorists" had arrived in Baargaal district. Puntland officials claimed the foreign extremists came from the Ras Kamboni region of south Somalia, close to the Kenyan border. One of the men was said to be a suspect in the 1998 U.S. Embassy attacks, while insurgents from the United States, Sweden, Yemen, Morocco and Pakistan were allegedly part of the group. Six insurgents were reported killed by local troops, while the rest fled to the mountains near the Baargaal district where they were bombed on June 1 by U.S. warplanes and shelled by the five-inch gun of the U.S. destroyer *Chafee* (a now rare example of a ship-to-shore bombardment). There were reports of civilian casualties in a group of nomads, but no evidence that the militants sustained any damage from the bombardment (*Puntland Post*, June 2).

Religious elders from Baargaal gathered later to announce that no foreigners were part of a group of local fighters attacked by the United States and Puntland regional government forces, describing any assertion to the contrary as a "fabrication" (Somaaljecel, June 5). The assault on Baargaal came five months after similarly unsuccessful attacks near the Kenyan border by U.S. AC-130 gunships. Somali sources continue to report U.S. troop movements along the Somali side of the Kenyan border (Shabelle Media Network, May 22).

Al-Qaeda: Here, There and Nowhere

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer claims that U.S. intelligence has confirmation of 30 al-Qaeda members active in Somalia and neighboring areas (ANGOP [Luanda], June 5). The U.S. special envoy for Somalia, John Yates, also sees an al-Qaeda hand behind the violence: "Because of the kind of fighting going on in Somalia, we suspect that there are still al-Qaeda related individuals in Somalia" (Shabelle Media Network, June 1). Perhaps appealing for continued U.S. support, TFG Prime Minister Ali

Muhammad Gedi described a threatening future for Somalia in which al-Qaeda will pursue its "satanic plan of turning the country into a breeding ground for terrorists from all over the world and a safe haven for all outlaws and violators of international legitimacy" (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 5).

In early June, a car bomb set off by a suicide attacker nearly killed Gedi at his home in Mogadishu. It was the fourth attempt in recent months to kill the prime minister. Gedi described the attack (which killed seven guards) as the work of al-Qaeda: "The suicide bombing is a new and alien culture in Somalia...They collaborated with terrorist groups abroad and used technologies that the Somalis do not know" (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 5). Likewise, U.S. special envoy John Yates observed that the tactics used in the May roadside bombing that killed four Ugandan soldiers "were very much like the tactics that al-Qaeda and other terrorist movements have used in the past." A Ugandan government investigation, however, later concluded that al-Qaeda played no part in the attack (Shabelle Media Network, May 18; Shabelle Media Network, May 21).

Not all TFG officials agree on the al-Qaeda threat. On June 6, Mogadishu's mayor, former warlord Mohamed Dheere, declared that "the Hawiye are now to blame for the bomb explosions in Mogadishu" (Shabelle Media Network, June 6). On the same day, TFG troops arrested the chairman of the Hawiye Committee, Haji 'Abdi Iman Umar, during a series of raids and arrests. Haji 'Abdi has denied any involvement of the Hawiye elders in the attacks (Radio HornAfrik, June 7). Bombings and assassinations of regional administration heads in Banadir district were attributed to Hawiye activity in a meeting of the regional council on June 3. In the Gedo region in southwest Somalia, local officials recently held talks with Ethiopian officials to refute allegations that al-Qaeda operatives were concentrating there for attacks on Ethiopia (HornAfrik, June 6).

Exit Ethiopia

The regime of Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has realized that talk of an impending Ethiopian withdrawal only emboldened the insurgents while doing nothing to hasten the arrival of the balance of the African Union peacekeeping mission, known as AMISOM. According to Zenawi, "Our defense forces will remain until they accomplish their mission...However, this does not mean that we want or can stay in Mogadishu or in Somalia indefinitely" (Ethiopian TV, June 10). A day

later, Zenawi appealed to the Security Council to fund the cash-short AU mission, referring to the “financial burden Ethiopia is shouldering” (Shabelle Media Network, June 11). The Ethiopian army is preparing new operations against ethnic Somali rebels and their Oromo allies in the Ogaden region, where oil exploration efforts are already underway (*Terrorism Focus*, June 5). Zenawi describes these groups as tools of the Eritreans in their efforts to destabilize the Ethiopian regime. In response to retaliatory strikes on ethnic Somalis in the Ogaden, the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) has promised to “become more vicious” in its attacks. There is always the possibility that Ethiopia may decide the best way to keep a lid on the resistance is to continue occupying Somalia until the Ogaden and its natural resources are secured, but Ethiopian troops targeted daily by roadside bombs and grenade attacks will have little appetite to stay put.

Lately, Zenawi seems to be suggesting that the eradication of terrorism in Somalia is not the objective of the Ethiopian occupation force. “It can be asked whether there exists a city where there are no terrorists,” he explained. “There can be terrorists hiding in other cities, let alone Mogadishu. So it is impossible to confidently say Mogadishu will be 100% free of terrorists. You cannot also be sure about Addis Ababa or New York, let alone Mogadishu...Even now the situation in the city is not that bad” (Ethiopian TV, June 10).

The assassinations and grenade attacks on Ethiopian troops have spread from the capital to Hawiye-dominated Beledweyn in central Somalia. In Somalia, there are many motivations for violence: the southern port of Kismayo is being fought over by TFG troops divided along clan lines; clan fighting in Mudug region erupted over a pool of rainwater during drought conditions; in Baidoa there have been horrific and unclaimed grenade attacks on a bank and a crowded cinema.

The Peacekeepers

On June 15, NATO offered to provide airlift services to AMISOM member nations to speed up deployment (Shabelle Media Network, June 15). Thus far, however, only a Ugandan Battle Group of 1,500 men has arrived from a projected AU force of 8,000. Burundi announced that it will send 1,820 troops to Somalia by French airlift in July, but Ghana appears to be waiting for a cease-fire in Somalia before it deploys, although it has also cited a lack of equipment and logistical support from the AU. The mission comes just as the AU mission

in Darfur is on the verge of collapse, with Rwanda and Senegal threatening to withdraw their troops. UN Undersecretary General for Political Affairs Lynn Pascoe recently stated that the UN was considering taking over Somalia’s political direction and reconciliation efforts while seeking to reinvigorate the AU’s peacekeeping mission (Radio Simba, June 9). The Security Council also agreed there was an urgent need to prepare plans for a possible UN peacekeeping force. The TFG is now stating its preference for a UN force (Shabelle Media Network, June 15).

Conclusion

The U.S. hunt for largely inactive al-Qaeda suspects in Somalia is proceeding at great risk to its reputation in the area. Its open alliance with Ethiopia and support for the Ethiopian occupation force have created an atmosphere of mistrust in fiercely independent Somalia. Despite enormous material and political costs, not one of the three foreign al-Qaeda suspects alleged to be taking refuge in Somalia (and wanted by Washington for their roles in the 1998 embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania) has been killed or captured.

In a May 23 webchat, Michael Ranneberger, the U.S. ambassador to Kenya, seemed to be backing off from the “ICU equals al-Qaeda” equation that has dominated recent U.S. policy in the region and is impeding reconciliation efforts. “I recognize that the Islamic Courts did manage to establish a degree of order in Mogadishu,” he said. “However, the Islamic Courts never had broad support among the Somali people and, importantly, the Islamic Courts were moving in a very radical direction, which would not have been to the benefit of the Somali people” (USINFO, May 23).

If Ethiopia withdraws, there is no guarantee that Islamist forces may not return to power, especially if there is a return to political chaos and street violence. The AU peacekeeping intervention is largely a failure (despite the efforts of the Ugandans) with only a small chance of revival. The Islamists will be quick to remind Mogadishu’s beleaguered civilians of the security that prevailed under the administration of the Islamic Courts. The Islamist leadership is nearly intact and has found safe harbors in Eritrea, Yemen and some Gulf states. There are a number of options available to the United States in its relations with Somalia that may be followed singularly or in combination:

1. Use of the U.S. military's four bases in the region (Camp Lemonier, Djibouti; Manda Bay, Kenya; Bilate and Hurso, Ethiopia) to conduct pre-emptive military operations designed to collect local intelligence and to seize or assassinate individuals deemed threats to national security.
2. Containment through continued naval operations and surveillance over-flights, while rebuilding the Somali navy to undertake coastal security duties.
3. Consolidation of the Ethiopian military presence with U.S. funding.
4. De-emphasis of the military option in favor of promoting inclusive national reconciliation and U.S. engagement in reconstruction efforts.
5. Turning the problem over to the UN by encouraging and funding a UN peacekeeping mission to replace the faltering AU effort.
6. Military occupation by U.S. forces (the most unlikely option).

Inclusive national reconciliation, support for AMISOM, increased development assistance and training for local security forces are the new cornerstones of a shifting U.S. policy in Somalia. The United States hopes for a transition to a democratically-elected government by 2009. In the meantime, the international community is waiting to see the results of the reconciliation conference before forming solid assistance plans. Anxious Somalis also wait to see if their country is destined for peace or to serve as the latest battleground in the war on terrorism.

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Trafficking and the Role of the Sinai Bedouin

By Joshua Gleis

On the evening of October 7, 2004, three trucks laden with explosives were driven to resorts in the northern Sinai where they were detonated, killing more than 30 people and wounding hundreds more. The targets were Israelis vacationing during their High Holidays at the usually tranquil desert oases of Taba, Ras al-Sultan and Tarabeen. At least three previously unknown terrorist organizations claimed responsibility for the terrorist incident; however, the leading suspect and group named by the Egyptian government was *al-Tawhid Wal-Jihad* ("Monotheism and Struggle"), comprised of Bedouin tribesmen from the Sinai Peninsula (*al-Ahram Weekly*, September 14-20, 2006). The Taba attacks marked the first time that Bedouins from the Sinai were implicated in acts of terrorism on Egyptian soil. This trend continued with the bombings at Sharm el-Sheikh, as well as various shootings of police and other security forces (*Daily Star* [Egypt], May 10, 2006). Analysts attribute this development to the fact that northern Bedouin tribesmen have not benefited economically as much as their southern brethren by the high level of tourism available in that part of the peninsula. Deep-seeded ideological, political and cultural differences between the Bedouin and the Egyptian government also explain the rise in terrorist activity.

While certainly a minority within the Bedouin population, the majority of illegal trafficking among Egypt, Israel and the Palestinian Territories is conducted by Bedouin smugglers. Bedouin tradition reaches back thousands of years; they are fiercely independent, principled and tribal. Bedouin smugglers tend to be involved in illegal activities namely for the financial benefits and historically negligible risks that such actions entail. Activities targeting Israel have sometimes been ignored by the Egyptians, unlike the scenes of mass arrests and shootouts between Egyptian security forces and Bedouin tribesmen that have plagued the region since the attacks in the Sinai Peninsula [1]. Since the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, this problem has intensified.

While narco-terrorism has been well documented in counter-terrorism and intelligence circles, not enough progress has been made in finding the nexus between terrorism and the many other forms of illegal activity practiced today. An increasingly popular illegal activity

that uses the same delivery methods as narcotics, terrorism and weapons smuggling is that of human trafficking. In Israel and Egypt, the Bedouin have played a key role in these smuggling activities as well. Human trafficking of women and underage girls, namely from Eastern Europe and other former Soviet Union states, is a multi-million dollar business in Israel and Egypt, which is operated almost exclusively by the Russian mafia in Israel and Eastern Europe (IsraelInsider, August 18, 2004) [2]. A few years ago, Israel implemented a number of reforms to curtail the activity of human smugglers, including tightening immigration controls at Ben-Gurion International Airport and the Haifa and Ashdod seaports (Fox News, August 18, 2004). Since Israeli officials have made it more difficult to transfer women into Israel through more conventional routes, the Russian mafia has turned to Bedouin tribesmen to accomplish the task.

As the original purveyor of smuggled goods between Israel and the Arab world, the Bedouin were the natural choice for the mafia when it came to human smuggling. As Major General (ret.) Yaakov Amidror, former head of research for Israeli Defense Force (IDF) Military Intelligence, has explained, “The smuggling is occurring across large areas, all of which are supposed to be under Egyptian control. Until recently, the Egyptians did not see any risk to themselves from these smuggling [operations]. However, since the terror [attacks] in the Sinai, especially along the shoreline, they are realizing that there is a possible connection between the smuggling into Israel and the terrorist operatives [in Egypt], and therefore maybe they will start to act against the smugglers” [3].

Bedouins are known for their excellent tracking ability. They can detect infiltrators and explosives and lead forces unscathed through harm’s way. While military service in the IDF for Bedouin is not compulsory, a sizeable number choose to volunteer, and the vast majority is known for their outstanding service, notably in special tracking units. Yet, these skills can also be used against the state, and a small number of Bedouin soldiers in the IDF have been found guilty of smuggling and even spying against the state (Naharnet, November 9, 2004; *Haaretz*, November 9, 2004).

The 70-mile border between Israel and Egypt that separates the Negev desert from the Sinai Peninsula is Israel’s least secure boundary. For a country known for its sophisticated security perimeters, Israel’s southern border does not have even a chain-link fence in many

areas. Some have justified this fact by arguing that a barrier would be useless since the shifting winds in the desert would bury it in sand in just a few years’ time. To construct and maintain a more effective barrier would take many years and incredible resources—time and resources that the country does not presently possess, as it is embroiled in conflicts with Hezbollah and the Palestinians.

Smuggling of women (known as the “white slave” trade), along with drugs, weapons and terrorist operatives is achieved by a number of methods: on foot, by all-terrain vehicles and SUVs, through tunnels and even by camel. Having entered Israel, the smuggled goods are transferred to Israeli Bedouin, usually of the same tribe, and transported to larger metropolises like Tel Aviv and Haifa. While there are multiple tribes in both the Sinai and Negev deserts, the most important for purposes of this study are those that span the Egyptian-Israeli and Egyptian-Gaza borders. These include the Sawarka and the Rumaylat tribes in northeast Sinai, the Tarabin, Ahayw’at and the ‘Azazma tribes that span from the Sinai into the West Bank and Israel’s “Green Line” as well as the Tayaha and Hanajra tribes in the Gaza Strip and Israel [4]. Smuggled weapons are usually concealed in various hiding places, including the areas surrounding Mount Harif and the Ramon Crater, and are later acquired by other Bedouins and smuggled to Palestinian militant groups.

Israel has re-shuffled its military units in an attempt to better monitor, intercept and prevent infiltrators and gun-runners from passing through the Sinai into the Negev desert. Due to its successes in thwarting smuggling operations out of the Gaza Strip, the IDF’s Gaza Division has been allocated the additional task of patrolling approximately 40 kilometers of the Sinai border, from the city of Rafah in Gaza eastward, where many smuggling operations have occurred (*Haaretz*, November 27, 2005). For years, these units largely ignored smuggling activities not directly related to terrorism, such as those of drugs and women. Although Israel and Egypt have made more concrete efforts to capture and prosecute these smugglers, both have fallen short. While Bedouin are often involved in more than one type of illegal activity at a time, military and police units are still targeting smuggling rings individually.

Statements by captured Bedouin involved in the Sharm el-Sheikh attacks illuminate the multidimensional aspects of the problem. One captive admitted to Egyptian interrogators that he sold explosives that he had

smuggled to the terrorists who used them in the attacks (IsraelInsider, October 10, 2004). Yet, “the explosives were sold on the assumption that they were going to the Palestinians,” explained an Egyptian official on condition of anonymity (*Haaretz*, November 27, 2005). This lends credibility to the complaint that the Egyptians do not do enough to stop terrorism being perpetrated outside of its borders. Lately, however, Egyptian security forces have been engaged in a rigorous hunt for Bedouin implicated in terrorist attacks. These security operations have resulted in the arrest of thousands of innocent Bedouin—leading to an even greater level of Bedouin hostility and resentment toward the Egyptian government.

For years, Egypt has been under pressure from U.S. and Israeli sources to secure its border with the Gaza Strip, known as the “Philadelphi Corridor.” To help facilitate this process, immediately prior to the 2005 withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, Israel agreed to a new protocol, allowing Egypt to boost its border forces in the hopes of stopping the flow of weapons and terrorists into the Palestinian Territories (BBC News, August 1, 2005). Despite these arrangements, however, the smuggling continues. Hamas and other groups took advantage of this lax environment to smuggle fighters, weapons and drugs into the Gaza Strip (*Haaretz*, October 16, 2006). Palestinian and Israeli officials are concerned that Iranian agents, members of Hezbollah, Iranian-trained members of Hamas and perhaps even elements of al-Qaeda were smuggled into the territory since Israel’s withdrawal (Associated Press, September 15, 2005). Additionally, large numbers of high-grade explosives, mortars, RPGs and anti-tank weapons have appeared during recent internal clashes between Fatah and Hamas (YNetNews, February 5; *Jerusalem Post*, February 2). Attempts to smuggle weapons from the Sinai continue; the most recent seizure was of approximately 1.5 tons of explosives in central Sinai destined for the Gaza Strip (Reuters, June 4).

As a minority in both states, the Bedouin are singled out both by the Israelis and Egyptians for roles that only a few of their people have participated in, thus exacerbating the resentment within the Bedouin community. This antipathy continues to linger and augment, leading to further conflict and an increase in the number of participants and sympathizers of illegal actions. In recent years, Israel and Egypt have compounded the problem by providing Bedouin with a disproportionately small amount of state resources. In Israel, this has led to Bedouin building towns

illegally, which are later ordered destroyed by the Israeli government (*The Independent*, November 29, 2005; *Christian Science Monitor*, November 19, 2002). The Egyptian government has fared even worse, with tactics going beyond discrimination to include government crackdowns, mass arrests and shootouts in an atmosphere increasingly tense following the Sinai bombings. Both governments have been criticized by human rights groups for their behavior. As stated by a Bedouin elder regarding the construction of the Sharm el-Sheikh fence in southern Sinai, “They want to keep Sinai Bedouins out of Sharm el-Sheikh, which will only add to our community’s feelings of alienation...Rather than preventing terrorism, that will only increase it” (*al-Ahram Weekly*, November 2-9, 2006).

Similar sentiment has been voiced regarding the situation in northern Sinai. As Bashir Abdel Fattah, a historian and expert on Sinai society, explains, “Police from Egypt have always been suspicious of north Sinai and, in turn, the people are suspicious of them. Loyalty to the state is low...The question is how to avoid war in the Sinai. But the crackdown only makes people more resentful” (*Washington Post*, October 2, 2005). Overall, the role of the Bedouin in Egyptian and Israeli society must be carefully monitored since they pose a problematic security threat to both states.

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Notes

1. As discussed in multiple interviews and correspondences with Maj. Gen. (ret.) Yaacov Amidror between April 2005 to December 2006.
2. The Russian mafia operating in Israel is a relatively new phenomenon for the state. The Russian mafia is predominantly comprised of Russians who immigrated to Israel following the breakup of the Soviet Union. While Israel did have its own homegrown, organized crime for decades, the Russian mafia introduced to Israeli society more sophistication as well as an increase in violence. At time of publication, the Israeli police and government are still at odds over how to deal effectively with this relatively new phenomenon.

3. Mentioned in an interview Maj. Gen. (ret.) Yaacov Amidror in May 2005.

4. This information was gleamed from an interview with a security official in Israel in the summer of 2006 who asked not to be identified. For more information on the tribes, see the report “Egypt’s Sinai Question” (January 2007) by the International Crisis Group.