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The Danger of Terrorist Black Holes in Southern Africa

By John Solomon

On March 13, a South African intelligence official warned that a number of international terrorists may be spending time in South Africa, using the country as a safehaven (South Africa Press Association, March 13). Furthermore, in October 2004, the CIA reportedly identified 29 al-Qaeda leaders serving in management and support positions operating from Pakistan and Iraq to South Africa (South Africa Press Association, October 4, 2004). Recent evidence suggests that prominent al-Qaeda financiers, facilitators and recruiters continue to operate in the generally underreported region of southern Africa. A brief historical survey of these events seems to reveal a discernible pattern that prominent global jihadis—sometimes serving as conduits between UK- and Pakistan-based networks—have used southern Africa as a possible medium through which to not only stage operations, but also secure refuge, money and recruits; all critical factors for executing attacks in support of the movement.

The new terrorism, epitomized by al-Qaeda and the broader jihadi movement, enjoys a dispersed, decentralized and arguably leaderless structure, instructed and driven more by ideology, doctrine and bottom-up social networks than by any one central figure. Since headless, flat organizations and movements are difficult to destroy in the most open, accessible environments, the task becomes even greater in regions riddled with “black holes” where porous borders, swathes of ungoverned space, lawlessness and easy access to arms and illicit trade converge to create comparative advantages for terrorists seeking refuge and support mechanisms for operations and attacks [1]. These opaque corridors, coupled

with information technology, afford ample space for jihadi “hubs” to move, nest and grow their networked infrastructure while retaining a quiet, threatening posture worldwide.

Southern Africa exemplifies one such corridor in which al-Qaeda might utilize comparatively advantageous conditions in order to remain viably intact and active. Al-Qaeda franchises are well-placed across west, north and east Africa, with growing signs that southern Africa may have been or is a key support base. Much of southern Africa contains “terrorist black holes” where lawlessness provides terrorists with the means to develop support structures—safehouses, training opportunities, mobility and funding channels—to advance their objectives. The fact that southern Africa has played host to a number of recent incidents involving prominent al-Qaeda facilitators further indicates its use and value, and warrants a closer look at this generally underreported region. With lawlessness, government corruption and a wide-range of preferred terrorist financing methods available—minerals, gemstones, pirated products and narcotics—al-Qaeda could indeed partake in illicit and unregulated trade in southern Africa to sustain itself.

Madagascar

When Jamal Khalifa was found dead in his gemstone mine in southeastern Madagascar in late January, it was unclear which was more puzzling: the murky circumstances surrounding his death, which his brother Malek emphasized to the press, or the more alarming assertion that he was involved in the African gemstone trade (*Asharq al-Awsat*, February 1). Jamal Khalifa was a widely-suspected al-Qaeda financier linked to a dizzying array of terrorist operatives, plots and front organizations across the globe. Through fronts established in the Philippines, Khalifa reportedly funded Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, a mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, and his nephew Ramzi Youssef to execute Operation Bojinka, a plot to simultaneously destroy 12 transpacific airliners bound for the United States from Asian cities. He is notably also credited with the creation of the Abu Sayyaf Group in the Philippines (*Manila Times*, February 1). Since 9/11, Saudi Arabia reportedly restricted Khalifa, who is also Osama bin Laden’s brother-in-law, to the kingdom and the seafood restaurant that he co-owned with his brother Malek in Jeddah. The fact that an al-Qaeda suspect of this profile maintained mining interests in Madagascar and elsewhere raises questions regarding al-Qaeda’s ability to capitalize on ungoverned spaces in southern Africa

and beyond for its financing activities.

Coincidentally, less than a week after Khalifa’s death, *Midi Madagaskira*, an Antananarivo-based daily, reported that Fazul Mohammed, a Comoros-born al-Qaeda leader, had not only survived a U.S. air strike that targeted him in Somalia, but also had been seen in Majunga, a seaside town in northwest Madagascar [2]. Mohammed allegedly directed the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. If it is true that he found safe passage from Somalia to Madagascar or the Comoros, it strongly suggests that there was an existing support infrastructure there to facilitate his movements. Another possible scenario is that he was directing fighters in Somalia while based in Madagascar or another African country.

Analysts and media reports often also associate Fazul Mohammed with diamond trading in western Africa in the late 1990s. He allegedly organized and took part in a smuggling scheme in Sierra Leone and Liberia through a Senegalese trader named Ibrahim Bah who was also a close associate of the president, Charles Taylor. Coincidentally, it may also be remembered that around the same time these alleged al-Qaeda diamond schemes took place, Yassin al-Qadi, another U.S.-designated terrorist financier, invested US\$3 million for a 12% interest in Global Diamond Resources, a California-registered company that mined diamonds in South Africa, and another multinational gemstone operation through New Diamond Corp. Ltd., an offshore company that he controlled. While the two individuals and their involvement in the gemstone trade may not be linked, the use of diamonds for terrorist financing activities is well-known and would most likely take place in southern Africa or other parts of the continent where precious stones are mined and traded.

South Africa

Madagascar is not the only example of a southern African country playing host to prominent jihadi operatives. While South Africa witnessed a spate of terrorist attacks and extremist activities in the Cape Town area by the Salafi-inspired PAGAD and Iranian-sponsored Qibla organizations in the late 1990s, there is perhaps a more worrying trend that prominent al-Qaeda operatives, with a much more global agenda, are using the state as a base of support operations. In January, the United States and the United Nations moved to freeze the assets of South African-based cousins Junaid and Farhad Dockrat for providing material and financial

support to al-Qaeda [3]. The cousins illustrate how jihadi hubs—individuals with extensive social networks within the movement—can become tentacles of support that facilitate the movement of human resources and capital to perpetuate the organization.

Junaid Dockrat is a dentist in Johannesburg. Professionals—doctors, lawyers, engineers—tend to be involved in terrorist financing activities more so than their non-professional counterparts and often earn enough through legitimate means to fund terrorism, making it difficult to prevent by conventional anti-money laundering measures. Junaid Dockrat allegedly transferred \$120,000 to Hamza Rabia, the now deceased al-Qaeda foreign operations chief, in March and April 2004 to facilitate the movement of South Africans to terrorist camps in Pakistan. The U.S. government also listed Dockrat as a majority co-owner of Sniper Africa, a purported hunting goods store that has been designated as a global terrorist entity [4]. Junaid could have acquired these funds through his legitimate employment as a medical professional and business owner. This illustrates a key challenge and distinction for why combating terrorist financing is difficult and different from traditional anti-money laundering measures. Terrorist financing is reverse money laundering. Terrorists dirty clean money, whereas money launderers and other criminals clean dirty money. Junaid's association with his more visible cousin, Farhad, likely caused Western intelligence services to identify him.

Farhad Dockrat is a Pretoria-based cleric also involved in terrorist financing and other support activities. The United States claims that he financed terrorism through a \$62,900 gift he gave to the Taliban ambassador in Pakistan to be forwarded to al-Akhtar Trust, an al-Qaeda charity front. In addition, Farhad seems to be active in Salafi proselytizing networks. He heads the "lavish" Darus Salaam Mosque in Laudium, a nearby suburb, which is reportedly frequented by the Pakistani and Malavian communities (*Daily Times*, January 30). His son, Muaz, lectures in the adjoining Islamic college. In 2005, Farhad, Muaz and a student were detained for a number of weeks in Gambia where they were suspected of al-Qaeda membership. Dockrat claimed that he was unjustly held and insisted that he was on a religious mission across the region to exchange "Islamic educational techniques" [5]. Perhaps indicative of the effectiveness of these techniques, Farhad's former student, Zoubier Ismail, was detained with other South Africans during a raid on an al-Qaeda safehouse in Pakistan in late 2004.

One pattern that emerges is an apparent South African link to jihadi operatives, often of Pakistani descent, in the United Kingdom and Pakistan. Haroon Aswat, another prominent jihadi who was active in Pakistan, though born in Gujarat, India, was detained in Zambia traveling from Zimbabwe in late July 2005 after his phone number was found on all four of London's July 7, 2005 suicide bombers. He reportedly exchanged a flurry of phone calls with each of them while he was in South Africa in the days before the attack (*The Times* [London], July 31, 2005). Although not conclusive, the phone calls suggest an operational relationship between Aswat in South Africa and the suicide cell in London led by Mohammed Sadiq Khan, who undertook terrorist training in Pakistan with a group of other Britons.

Aswat has an extensive history of links and associations with al-Qaeda and the greater jihadi movement in and out of the United Kingdom and Pakistan and, later, the southern African region. In London in the 1990s, he was an assistant to Abu Hamza at the Finsbury Park Mosque. In 2002, the U.S. government prosecuted him for attempting to establish a terrorist training camp in Bly, Oregon. Apart from his possible involvement in 7/7, the United States recently linked Aswat to Mohammed al-Ghabra, a designated terrorist financier, facilitator and recruiter based in east London. In 2004, Aswat allegedly met al-Ghabra in Pakistan where al-Ghabra was engaged in extensive terrorist training. The United States also accuses al-Ghabra of recruiting and sending Britons to train and fight in Pakistan and Iraq. Aswat, al-Ghabra and al-Qaeda networks in Pakistan seem to have constituted a triangular link among training activities in Pakistan, financing activities in South Africa and operations and attacks in the United Kingdom.

The case of Abd al-Muhsin al-Libi further illustrates this trend of prominent al-Qaeda operatives using South Africa as a base for terrorist support infrastructures. Al-Libi, also known as Ibrahim Tantouche, emerged in South Africa in February 2004 when he was detained for holding a fake South African passport. Later that year, British security agencies found boxes of South African passports at the home of a suspected al-Qaeda member in Britain. The passports were legitimate passports, not fakes, indicating that they were obtained illegally through a South African government official (*The Star* [South Africa], July 28, 2004). There seems to be a good possibility that al-Libi acquired the fake passport through al-Qaeda support structures in South Africa.

Al-Libi previously directed the al-Qaeda terrorist financing fronts, the Afghan Support Committee and Revival of Islamic Society. Both operated under charity covers and diverted money to al-Qaeda that was raised for orphans who in reality were either dead or non-existent. Although his current whereabouts are not publicly known, as of November 2005 he was in South Africa, free and awaiting the outcome of a political asylum application.

Conclusion

While these terrorist activities give indication that southern Africa could offer sanctuaries for prominent jihadis to support or plot future terrorist attacks, these same events may also suggest that the U.S.-led efforts are resulting in tactical victories. Key sectors of the network seem to be emerging. Khalifa's appearance in Madagascar is worrying because it signifies that important terrorist financing mechanisms such as diamond trading may be available to high-profile al-Qaeda associates. Yet, at the same time, travel bans, asset freezes and the detainment of prominent operatives also suggest in each of the cases cited that important victories are being won.

Identifying and neutralizing terrorist support infrastructures are a critical part of any successful counter-terrorism strategy. The United States' announcement that the Pentagon will create an African Central Command in 2008, while explained at least in part by energy security and balancing China, may also indicate that the United States will continue to monitor and increasingly dismantle these jihadi support hubs and prevent them from proliferating further.

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Notes

1. For a comprehensive study, see Rem Korteweg and David Ehrhardt, *Terrorist Black Holes: A Study into Terrorist Sanctuaries and Governmental Weakness*, TNO Defense Security and Safety, 2006.
2. Report found at: <http://www.meobservatory.com/news/2007/02/news2020607.htm>.
3. South Africa exercised a veto in the Security Council to prevent UN designation, so only the U.S. designation applies at present. See also "UN links SA

men to al-Qaeda," *Sunday Times*, January 21, 2007.

4. See U.S. Treasury press release: <http://www.ustreas.gov/press/releases/hp230.htm>.

5. For more information, see: http://molvi.blogspot.com/2005/10/missing-persons_08.html.

Internal Divisions Threaten Kurdish Unity

By Lydia Khalil

After years of infighting and repression by Saddam Hussein's regime, Iraq's Kurds were finally able to seize the opportunity for autonomy and influence presented by the 2003 U.S.-led invasion. Since then, they have solidified the de facto autonomy that was established under the No Fly Zone and retained power and influence over Iraq's national policies. The Kurdish leadership was able to accomplish these significant achievements by maintaining a unified front and overcoming years of disarray and distrust. In June 2006, the Kurdish leadership in Northern Iraq announced the long awaited unification of a Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Despite their success, Iraq's Kurds must now wrestle with deep-seated and long-standing issues that may be even more difficult to overcome than the legacy of civil war and repression. Iraq's Kurds must not only overcome their past, but also chart a singular future. As Kurdish fortunes improve and their power increases, so do the stakes. There are a number of issues that will come to a head that could spell trouble for Kurdish unity and continued stability within the newly unified KRG. The issues affecting Iraqi Kurdish unity and stability can be broadly broken down into internal and external factors. This analysis will focus on the internal factors that may affect Kurdish unity.

Internal Fissures

The first internal factor is the full implementation of the unity agreement. Internally, the KRG must address the greater demands for democratization and good governance as well as address systemic corruption. They also have to manage constituent desires for independence and tackle the ongoing power struggle between the so called "old guard," which includes the mid-level politburo members of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and the "new guard," consisting

of younger, Western-educated and reform-minded politicians within the KRG leadership. In addition to this, they will have to come to a workable resolution on Kirkuk. Administrative unification and transformation of the KRG will unfold in an environment of intense internal political competition.

Although the administration of the Iraqi Kurdish region was officially unified under the KRG, they still have yet to implement the unification agreement fully. This means that there are still unresolved issues and rivalries between the preeminent Kurdish political groups—the KDP and PUK. For one, unifying the administrations will mean dismantling old patronage networks. In doing so, the PUK-KDP leadership will be forced to manage the ramifications of the fallout within the mid-level political ranks in order to strengthen their institutions and ministries. The so-called “old guard” still has long standing feuds, rivalries, personal interests and patronage networks that could be threatened by unification or by greater democracy in the region.

The other obstacle to unification is the armed forces of each party—the peshmerga. The Iraqi constitution calls for the creation of a unified National Guard—ostensibly made up of the same peshmerga fighters that had previously fought one another—to provide internal security for the North. This is no easy task. The challenge is to unify their command and control so that they can comply with the constitution, provide adequate security, link up to the central command in Baghdad and prevent the temptation to call in the peshmerga whenever there is an internal dispute between the KDP and PUK. Despite the unification agreement, there remain two separate peshmerga ministries. Peshmerga fighters are loyal to their political bosses, not to the KRG. The peshmerga are affiliated with the parties and they perceive themselves as PUK and KDP peshmerga, separately. Looming in the background are past grievances from the civil war that raged from 1994-1998.

Like the peshmerga ministries, the Ministry of Finance is still not unified. Implementation agreements have stalled because the two parties could not agree on how to split or consolidate revenues, or how to unify their financial administrations. The split in government inhibits the efficient distribution of services and hinders the pace of reconstruction. Kurdish civilians are becoming increasingly frustrated with this as they see more and more reconstruction money coming into the region with little result.

The Kurdish leadership has touted the success of their democratic experiment in Kurdistan and offers it up as a model for the rest of Iraq. Yet how democratic is Iraqi Kurdistan? According to one Kurdish official, in the recent elections “there were all kinds of intimidation; there was ballot stuffing and a variety of things...It shows that as ‘democratic’ as the north is and as developed of a civil society it has, it is still fragile” [1]. Although there are freedoms in the KRG, political expression and civic participation have been hampered by the overwhelming presence of the KDP and PUK, who monopolize the political space and resources. Kurds feel that there is little they can do to change the policies of the KDP and PUK. The March 2006 riot in Halabja was a clear sign of this tension. Hundreds of protesters threw stones and even destroyed a memorial dedicated to the victims of Saddam Hussein’s 1988 chemical attack on the town (KurdishMedia.com, March 24, 2006). The demonstrators marched through Halabja chanting, “We don’t want government officials here...You have done nothing for the city...All government officials are corrupt” (AFP, March 16, 2006). Some analysts have labeled the Halabja protest as the most serious challenge to the KRG since its inception.

Corruption is also rampant. In the rush to implement reconstruction projects, money is flowing everywhere, and often into the coffers of the respective parties. Anecdotes such as the following are not uncommon: “I had somebody come to me and say I have a deal for a cement factory in Kurdistan. It will cost \$120 million. Can you find some funding? So I was able to communicate with some people [in Kurdistan] and they said if it’s a sovereign contract we’ll fund it. My connection...called the office of the prime minister. They told him 50% on top of it and we’ll give it [the contract] to you” [2].

Ordinary citizens and political leaders are beginning to speak out, frustrated by the two parties’ lack of movement and buoyed by the promise of democracy throughout all of Iraq. The problem, however, is that there is only enough political openness to encourage civil society and political participation, but not enough to broaden it. This is a dangerous situation now that Iraq’s Kurds have been given the promise and taste of political and civil life outside of the old KDP/PUK framework.

The arrests of Kamal Sayid Qadir and Hawez Hawezi for allegedly “defaming” KDP and PUK leaders drew the unwanted attention of the international community to the lack of political freedoms in Kurdistan (KurdishMedia.com, December 28, 2005). Qadir wrote

a series of high profile articles in the Kurdish media, outlining corruption and nepotism within the KRG. Peshmerga associated with the KDP seized Qadir and detained him for weeks without charges and without communication with a lawyer or his family. He was later released and officially charged with defamation, but his ordeal put in doubt Kurdish leaders glowing accounts of a free Kurdistan.

Other political parties besides the KDP and PUK have had a difficult time penetrating politics. Many parties have either been co-opted by the KDP and PUK or have been suppressed. The Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) is arguably the most serious opposition to the two parties, challenging the long standing commitment to secularism in the Kurdish region. The KIU is gaining traction among the population by criticizing the government for corruption and economic mismanagement. The KIU was established in 1994 and has been led by Salahadin Bahadadin [3]. It was originally part of the “unity” list with the KDP and PUK during the first round of elections. It has long been active in social work in Kurdistan and is becoming increasingly popular with students. The KDP feels threatened by the gains of the KIU, and it sent its supporters to mount an attack on its offices in December 2005. Seven were killed and many injured (RFE/RL, December 9, 2005). The Kurds also have to find a way to better incorporate the religious and ethnic minorities living in Iraqi Kurdistan—namely the Assyrians and the Turkomen [4]. The Kurds should reach an accommodation with the Turkomen especially, because both communities have a historical claim on the oil-rich province of Kirkuk.

Much of this is contingent upon who is driving the policies and leadership of the KRG. The future will depend on how much influence the old guard has in determining the future direction of Iraqi Kurdistan. If the old guard leadership maintains their hold on decision making, then tensions will surely continue. As it stands, they have the most to lose in the unification process. With the two administrations joining, somebody is going to lose a position or influence over a sector or neighborhood. The young guard, for the most part, has a “big picture” view. They are more concerned about developing institutions and encouraging investment. The new generation of leaders is not hampered by resentment over past conflicts, and grew up at a time when Kurdistan was largely independent. The younger leadership will emerge only if the insecurities of the old guard are alleviated. To what degree the younger leaders can work around or with the old guard is still uncertain.

For now, they have found it necessary to work with rather than against them, at least until they shore up enough of their own power to confront them.

The status of the oil-rich province of Kirkuk is a hugely contentious issue in Iraqi politics. The Kurds claim this territory as rightfully theirs, but their claims are contested by other Iraqi groups who do not want Kirkuk to be part of the KRG. Analysts focus on the potential of Kirkuk to spark a civil war within Iraq, but there is a sub-level conflict as well. Kirkuk is a point of rivalry between the KDP and the PUK. Kirkuk will be a big political victory for whichever Kurdish group brings it into the Kurdistan region. The party that accomplishes this will be lauded by the population as the group that brought back their historical city. It will also upset the balance of the North. As of now, the governorates are split evenly between the KDP and PUK, with the KDP having a slight advantage. Who will be the majority in Kirkuk if it comes under the KRG? For the two parties, it is a new political space to fight over. Outwardly, the Kurds present a unified front on Kirkuk. According to Qubad Talabani, the KRG representative to the United States, “Kirkuk is a Kurdish issue, not a KDP or PUK issue...It will be a joint exercise. We may have difference of opinion, we may have other political battles, but not over Kirkuk. We should not and we will not have this competition” [5]. If the Kurds stay unified on this issue, they may succeed in bringing Kirkuk under the KRG. Unfortunately, a unified front will be difficult to maintain.

Conclusion

The issue of Kirkuk, if forced too soon, could have a severe destabilizing affect on Kurdish security. It could become a cause for greater internal tension, and even if the Kurds are successful in integrating Kirkuk into the KRG, it could invite interference by Turkey. Yet Kirkuk is not the only issue. Good governance, greater civil liberties and true opportunities for political participation are also critical to ensuring the KRG’s security in the long-term. Although it is unlikely that the KDP and PUK will revert back to violent conflict over issues of unification, resources and political control, it is likely that the region could see more violent protests like the Halabja demonstration if demands for better governance are not met.

Lydia Khalil recently returned from Iraq where she worked as governance policy advisor for the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad. Prior to that, Lydia

was appointed to the White House Office of Homeland Security. She has worked at home and abroad for the U.S. government, international organizations, private companies and think-tanks on a variety of Middle East political and terrorism issues.

Notes

1. Interview with a senior Kurdish official, January 2006.
2. Interview with a senior Iraqi advisor, February 2006.
3. For more information on the party, see <http://www.kurdiu.org>.
4. Interview with Fawzi Hariri, Iraq's minister of industry and minerals, who is Assyrian and is part of the KDP.
5. Interview with Qubad Talabani, the KRG representative to the United States, January 2006.

Malaysia's Role in Thailand's Southern Insurgency

By Ian Storey

Against a backdrop of escalating communal and sectarian violence and warnings that militants could extend their attacks to Bangkok, Thai Prime Minister General Surayud Chulanont met with his Malaysian counterpart Abdullah Badawi on February 11-12. The ongoing insurgency in the three southern provinces of Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani dominated the two leaders' meetings. Malaysia plays an important role in efforts to improve security in Thailand's south, as the three violence-wracked provinces abut the four Malaysian states of Kelantan, Perak, Perlis and Kedah. The majority of the population of Thailand's three southern provinces is Malay-Muslim, and shares strong ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural bonds with the people across the border. The 400-mile border separating the two countries is highly porous, and since January 2004 the Thai authorities have continually alleged that militants have crossed over into Malaysia after conducting attacks. At their meetings, Surayud and Abdullah agreed to improve security along the border and resolve the contentious issue of dual-nationality. Abdullah also offered Malaysia's good offices to mediate the dispute, although there were conflicting reports over what Kuala Lumpur's role would actually be in the coming months. Improved relations with Malaysia are an important strategy in the Surayud government's

attempts to extinguish the insurgency, but a resolution to the conflict rests squarely with Bangkok.

The Deterioration of Bilateral Relations from 2004-2006

At the initial outset of the violence in 2004, the government of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra sought Malaysia's help to contain the violence. From the Malaysian perspective, one of the root causes of the problem is poor socio-economic conditions, and in August 2004 the two countries agreed to initiate a Joint Development Strategy (JDS) aimed at boosting economic linkages between the three southern provinces and Malaysia's more economically developed northern states. Later, Malaysia responded positively to a request from the Thai government to send Islamic scholars to the south to propagate a "correct" understanding of Islam.

Thai-Malaysian relations deteriorated significantly, however, over the Thaksin government's heavy-handed attempts to defeat the insurgency and accusations that militants were using Malaysian territory to plan and train for attacks. Malaysian leaders were appalled at human rights atrocities such as the October 2004 Tak Bai incident in which 78 Malay-Muslim protestors suffocated to death in the back of Thai army trucks. Abdullah expressed concern that unless Thailand could contain the crisis, the violence would spread, possibly across the border into Malaysia. Relations worsened when Thaksin alleged that southern militants were being trained in the jungles of Kelantan. Abdullah angrily rejected the allegation, declaring that Malaysia was "not a base that can be used by any group planning to take action against any other country" (*Straits Times*, December 19, 2004).

Relations reached their nadir in August 2005 when 131 Malay-Muslims crossed into Malaysia claiming persecution from the Thai authorities. Bangkok demanded that Kuala Lumpur repatriate the group on the grounds that some among them were militants. Malaysia incensed its neighbor by asking Bangkok to guarantee the group's human rights and by allowing the UNHCR to screen the refugees. In December 2005, Malaysia repatriated one of the 131 refugees, Manase Jaelo, whom Bangkok claimed was the mastermind behind the January 4, 2004 raid on an arms depot. To date, however, the other 130 refugees remain in Malaysia. During 2006, the Thaksin government repeated the accusation that southern militants were

being sent to training camps in Kelantan, and that bombs manufactured in Malaysia were being smuggled into Thailand. Kuala Lumpur warned Bangkok not to use Malaysia as a scapegoat for the violence (AFP, June 17, 2006).

The Malaysian government does not support the southern insurgency and has a vested interest in seeing stability return to the area. The Malaysian government worries not only about the possible spillover effects of the conflict, but also that regional terrorist groups such as Jemaah Islamiya (JI) may make themselves central to the conflict, a fear most recently expressed by Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar (Associated Press, February 8). Thai allegations of militant training camps located in Kelantan are probably untrue, as there are plenty of remote places in the three southern provinces to conduct this kind of activity; indeed, one such camp was raided by the Thai army on March 2 in Narathiwat. At any rate, the Thaksin government never provided concrete evidence to back up its allegations. Nevertheless, Thai claims that militants regularly cross over into Malaysia, and plan attacks there, have more resonance. The border is highly porous, and there are an estimated 50,000-100,000 people in the area who hold both Thai and Malaysian identity cards, facilitating easy access across the border. Furthermore, while the Malaysian government does not support the insurgency, there is a lot of sympathy from people in the northern states for their ethnic brethren across the border, sympathy which increased significantly in the wake of incidents such as Tak Bai. There have been allegations that local police in Kelantan turn a blind eye to the presence of Malay-Muslim militants.

At the official level, moreover, Malaysian cooperation with Thailand during 2004-2006 was constrained by several factors. First, the Malaysian authorities have, in the past, been reluctant to hand over suspects to the Thais because they feared they might be subject to extrajudicial executions, and were concerned of the political backlash that would follow. Second, the country's governing party, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), cannot be perceived as caving into Thai demands as this would provide political ammunition to the Islamic opposition Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS), which controls Kelantan state. Third, as chair of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Malaysia believes it has a duty to protect the rights of Muslims around the world.

Thai-Malaysia Relations Post-Coup

After the military-led coup of September 19, 2006, Prime Minister Surayud embarked on a fence-mending mission with Malaysia. In October, Surayud met with Abdullah in Kuala Lumpur to discuss the insurgency. The two leaders agreed to establish a direct channel of contact, while Surayud promised that if the 130 refugees wanted to return to Thailand they would be "welcomed in peace" (Bernama, October 18, 2006). In November, Surayud annoyed Kuala Lumpur by alleging that southern militants were raising funds on the Malaysian side of the border by soliciting donations and through extortion. Malaysia rejected the claim, but by the end of the year relations had recovered sufficiently for Abdullah to praise Surayud's more "diplomatic" approach to resolving the conflict (*Bangkok Post*, December 12, 2006).

Several months earlier it had been revealed that former Malaysian premier Mahathir Mohamad had mediated three rounds of peace talks between senior Thai military officers and exiled leaders of older insurgency groups, such as the Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO), on the Malaysian island of Langkawi during 2005. Although the talks were brokered by Mahathir's own peace foundation, both Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur had obviously given their nod of approval. The talks produced a Joint Peace and Development Plan for the south that rejected the idea of independence (or even autonomy), but called for an amnesty for exiled leaders, the restoration of the Southern Border Provinces Administration Center (SBPAC) and the introduction of the Malay language in schools. When the recommendations were presented to Thaksin in February 2006, the prime minister ignored them. The talks were of little value anyway as it has become clear that the exiled leaders have little influence over the current generation of insurgents (*Terrorism Monitor*, September 8, 2006).

In January of this year, on the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit, Surayud and Abdullah agreed to reconvene annual talks between the two leaderships and expedite JDS projects. Malaysia and Indonesia also agreed to a Thai request to include the three restive provinces in the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle in another effort to boost economic development in the area. Further progress was achieved during the Surayud-Abdullah meetings of February 11-12. The two leaders

agreed to resolve the issue of dual-nationality by sharing biometric information contained in electronic databases to identify people with dual-nationality. Malaysia, which does not recognize dual-nationality, has said that any Malaysian national found to have two passports will be asked to choose a single nationality.

The two leaders also discussed tightening security along the porous border. Prior to Abdullah's meeting, Surayud had suggested extending the two-mile security barrier between the two countries to 17 miles in an effort to curb insurgent activities and smuggling (*The Nation*, February 1). Malaysia was initially lukewarm on the proposal, but after Abdullah's visit the Thai-Malaysia joint border committee agreed to extend it by six miles (*Bangkok Post*, February 14). On March 1, the Thai army revealed that it would begin joint patrols with the Malaysian police on the border between Satun and Perlis for three months starting on March 13 (TNA, March 2).

The most intriguing aspect of the Surayud-Abdullah meeting was the issue of Malaysia's possible role as a mediator between the Thai government and the insurgents. In Thailand, the Bernama news agency quoted Abdullah as stating that Malaysia was well-placed to act as a mediator: "We know the separatist groups, in the sense that they are Muslims of Malay descent and that Malaysia has good relations with Thailand" (Bernama, February 13). Thai Defense Minister Boonrawd Somtas welcomed Abdullah's offer, but Foreign Minister Nitya Pibulsonggram denied that Thailand was seeking a role for Malaysia as a mediator. The Malaysian foreign minister responded that it was up to Thailand to make a formal request for mediation. Later, Surayud muddied the waters further by saying that Thailand welcomed Malaysia's offer of mediation if it could "help us figure out the right group [to talk to]" (*The Nation*, February 17).

It remains to be seen whether talks between the Thai government and the insurgents will take place and what role, if any, Malaysia will play. So far the insurgents have not taken up the government's offer of talks and are unlikely to do so as long as their success against the Thai authorities continues. As mentioned earlier, talks between Bangkok and the exiled groups seems to be of limited utility, and Mahathir has said his role as mediator is no longer welcome (*The Nation*, January 9).

The Violence Continues

Despite the implementation of new policies post-coup, the violence continues to escalate (*Terrorism Monitor*, February 1). The day after the Malaysian prime minister returned home, Surayud admitted that his government had yet to win over the hearts and minds of the people in the south, remarking that the local population "still have no confidence in government authorities" (*Bangkok Post*, February 14). As a sign of the prime minister's frustration, and in his first open split with the coup leader, Surayud accused General Sonthi Boonyaratglin of not doing enough to curb the violence in the south (*Bangkok Post*, February 14). In response, General Sonthi admitted that he had put "political matters" ahead of the insurgency, a reference to the government's plummeting popularity and the machinations of former Prime Minister Thaksin (*Bangkok Post*, February 24).

The failure of the Surayud government to make substantial inroads against the insurgents was underscored in spectacular fashion on February 18 when militants conducted 50 coordinated bombings, shootings and arson attacks across Yala, Narathiwat, Pattani and Songkla, killing nine and injuring 44. With Thai-Chinese businesses bearing the brunt of the damage, the attacks were timed to coincide with the arrival of the Lunar New Year. The Thai press strongly criticized the military and government for failing to prevent the violence, despite warnings that attacks would take place over the Chinese New Year. Several newspapers also criticized Surayud's policy of reconciliation and his offer to hold talks with the insurgents. The prime minister, however, declared that the attacks would not dissuade him from seeking talks with the militants. In the wake of the attacks, Defense Minister Boonrawd admitted to parliament that the government had failed to contain the violence in the south. He also declared that 1,000 youth were actively involved in the insurgency and that they could draw on the support of 10,000 sympathizers. Boonrawd claimed that some militants had enrolled at universities in Bangkok and could launch attacks in the capital (*The Nation*, February 23).

Conclusion

The meetings between Surayud and Abdullah were widely hailed in both the Thai and Malaysian press as signaling a major improvement in bilateral relations. While the outcome of the meetings is likely to have a

positive impact on security along the Thai-Malaysia border, increased dialogue and cooperation between the two countries will not in itself bring an end to the conflict. Fundamentally, the insurgency remains a domestic issue that only Thailand itself can resolve.

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Europe's Emerging Counter-Terrorism Elite: The ATLAS Network

By Ludo Block

Special operation forces, or in police terminology special intervention teams, are an essential asset in any counter-terrorism operation. Their deployment can be needed during a terrorist incident or as a logical follow-up on gathered intelligence with the aim to arrest terrorists and prevent an attack. The need for well-trained intervention units in Europe was first demonstrated during the 1972 Olympics in Munich when Palestinian terrorists kidnapped members of the Israeli Olympic team and the subsequent action to rescue the hostages failed tragically. Following this incident, most European countries created their own counter-terrorism special intervention units that were embedded in either police or military structures. Examples of present-day special intervention units in Europe are the renowned British SAS, French GIGN and German GSG-9 and the lesser-known units like the Austrian COBRA, Danish AKS, Dutch DSI, Estonian K-Commando and Finnish Karhuryhmä. Although the character of global terrorism has changed—broadly speaking from bombings and hijackings to suicide attacks—the need for special interventions has not decreased. On the contrary, contemporary terrorists tend to have little risk-aversion, meaning that specialized intervention is needed more than ever. This can be illustrated by the incident in April 2004 when a Spanish police officer was killed and 11 wounded as the alleged ringleader of the Madrid bombings, Sarhane ben Abdelmajid Fakheth, blew himself up together with three accomplices when the police raided their apartment. There is also the instance

in November 2004 when a terrorist suspect threw a hand grenade, wounding three Dutch police officers part of an intervention unit, illustrating the dangers that police face when engaging terrorists.

To reach a high level of professionalism, special intervention units place much emphasis on training and, when possible, the sharing of each other's experiences. Practical experience with counter-terrorism, however, often comes with high prices paid in terms of trial and error. Out of fear that they may lose their "competitive advantage," they are understandably cautious in sharing their special knowledge, expertise or skills. Cooperation between special intervention units is therefore largely based on informal contacts and, above all, on mutual trust. In 1996, the European Union first politically pushed an initiative for cooperation in this field when the EU Council decided to create a directory of specialized counter-terrorist competences, skills and expertise to facilitate cooperation on special interventions between member states. Although it was envisaged that member states would take turns maintaining the directory, little was actually done until September 2001. After 9/11, the Council—in an extraordinary meeting following the terrorist attacks—ordered Europol to take responsibility for the directory. At the same Council meeting, the European Police Chiefs were instructed to organize and coordinate cooperation of the special intervention units. This led to the establishment of the "ATLAS network," an informal cooperation structure between special intervention units in the European Union. Its initial goal was to bring each special intervention unit to the highest possible level of professionalism through intense structural mutual cooperation [1].

The first meeting of the heads of the intervention units took place in October 2001, and the ATLAS network currently regroups more than 30 counter-terrorist special intervention units based in the police, gendarmerie and armed forces of the EU member states and the non-EU member Norway [2]. The little known network is, however, not formally institutionalized in any EU framework. Only in November 2005, based on a short European Commission press briefing, was there any public media coverage of the ATLAS network, revealing its name and existence [3]. In January 2006, the EU counter-terrorism coordinator in a public speech briefly mentioned the ATLAS network and its possible usage in case of hostage situations and other emergencies requiring cross-border assistance [4].

Meanwhile, cooperation between the units in the network has been enhanced on various terrains. European funds were freed for setting up an operative database to act as a library on completed operations and as support for acquisitions of common special equipment, as well as for setting up an expert group on equipment and technologies [5]. Europol was tasked with providing the units secure means of communication and in 2005 personnel from each unit in the ATLAS network was instructed in the use of Europol's secure communication platform, "EurOPs" [6].

Joint counter-terrorism exercises as well as seminars, studies and the exchange of materials between the special intervention units in various formations have in the past six years been organized on a regular basis. Examples include a four-day international exercise in 2003 in Germany to increase competencies to handle assault and hostage taking from boats and a large-scale exercise in 2004 in the harbor of Rotterdam. Joint studies on improvement of operational procedures and techniques that have been conducted include a joint study in Spain of the effect of explosives on different types of doors to improve accessing techniques and a study and exercises in Italy of forced entry into high-speed trains [6].

According to a study of the Swedish National Defense College, the advantages of ATLAS cooperation for small countries like the Nordic states are many, ranging from joint exercises that offer possibilities to test special equipment to the possibility of exchanging experiences from demanding incidents face-to-face [7]. Meanwhile, access to alternate training situations is an asset of interest to all units in the network. The need for training cannot be emphasized enough as was sadly demonstrated recently when a French GIGN member was killed and two others seriously wounded during a seemingly routine arrest of a mentally ill person who was shooting at the police with a shotgun (*Le Monde*, January 20).

Although the current primary aim of the ATLAS network is mutual training to a common standard, it is foreseen that the cooperation could expand to an operational level. Plans for organizing assistance possibilities from neighboring countries have been considered from the inception of the network. Operational cooperation, however, is still somewhat of a sensitive issue. Governments are reluctant to give permission for deployment of "foreign" police or military on their sovereign territory especially when this by definition entails the possible use of deadly force. Nevertheless, in

the elaboration of the 2004 EU multi-annual strategic plan on police and judicial cooperation—the so-called Hague Program—development of a legal framework for operational cooperation in special interventions was explicitly included [8].

In October 2004, the European Police Chiefs attended the ATLAS exercise at the harbor of Rotterdam and discussed the question of the appropriate legislative framework if such an operation should ever take place in reality. The idea of a formal legal framework to regulate cooperation between special intervention units, however, did not receive a warm welcome from the units themselves. They preferred a less formal approach that allows the network to draw up its internal rules, procedures and organizational arrangements [9]. From a professional perspective, the preference of the units for informal cooperation with little public exposure is understandable. Nonetheless, in the current European political landscape it would be naïve to assume that operational assistance could be rendered on the same informal basis as combined training and exchange of experience. Furthermore, since no member state can pretend that it has the capacity to deal with all kinds of large-scale situations that require a special intervention, the possibility of a request for actual operational assistance from one of the EU member states is far from hypothetical.

A further discussion on a possible legal framework for special interventions in the European Union started in 2005 and issues discussed included the scope of cooperation (the definition of crisis, type of assistance to be rendered), civil and penal responsibility, the decision-making process (chain of command during operations), working procedures and financial issues [10]. As such discussions in the EU policy-making process usually take some time, the six largest European states agreed in March 2006 as an interim solution on developing joint support teams to offer operational assistance in case of serious terrorist attacks. These expert teams or liaison officers could provide on-site support to an attacked country upon its request [11].

In December 2006, Austria presented a concrete draft of a legal framework for cooperation between the special intervention units in crisis situations [12]. The envisaged framework lays down general rules and conditions to allow for special intervention units of one member state to provide assistance and/or actual operational deployment on the territory of another member state. The most essential issues covered by the proposed

framework are those regarding the chain of command and civil and penal liability, while further organizational and operational details are left to the professionals involved.

Already, the ATLAS network fulfills an important role in European counter-terrorism capabilities by enhancing mutual trust and reaching common standards between the intervention units and by further professionalizing counter-terrorist intervention techniques. With the proposed legal framework, actual deployment of special intervention units from each European country across Europe becomes possible. This would further enhance the role of the ATLAS network, which is a much needed step in the development of a common European special intervention capacity.

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Notes

1. Conclusions adopted by the JHA Council (12156/01), Brussels, September 20, 2001.
2. *Combating Terrorism in Nordic Countries: A Comparative Study of the Military's Role*, Swedish National Defense College, 2003.
3. European Broadcasting Service, November 29, 2005, item reference: I-049865en.
4. Presentation by Gijs de Vries, EU counter-terrorism coordinator, at a seminar of the Center for European Reform in Brussels, January 19, 2006.
5. Amendments submitted to the meeting of the European Parliament Committee on Budgets of 4, 5 and 6, October 2005.
6. AGIS project descriptions and evaluations 2003, 2004, 2005.
7. *Combating Terrorism in Nordic Countries: A Comparative Study of the Military's Role*.
8. *Council and Commission Action Plan Implementing The Hague Program Strengthening Freedom, Security and Justice in the European Union*, Brussels, June 10, 2005.
9. Conclusions on the 10th meeting of the Police Chiefs Task Force, October 11-12, 2004.
10. Discussion document on a normative framework for "ATLAS" (8434/05), Brussels, April 25, 2005.
11. Conclusions of the meeting of the interior ministers of France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and the

United Kingdom, Heiligendamm, March 22-23, 2006.
12. *Official Journal of the European Union*, C321, December 29, 2006.