

MILITANT LEADERSHIP MONITOR

Personalities Behind the Insurgency

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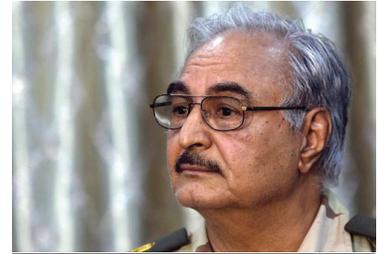
ISIS' NEMESIS IN ALEPPO: KHALID HAYANI AND ITIHAD LIWA SHUHADA BADR

Nicholas A. Heras

In spite of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria's (ISIS) success in Iraq, it is worth remembering that it is battling against a number of armed groups in Syria, not just the Assad government. One of the armed opposition groups that has been the most committed to fighting ISIS in Aleppo and its suburbs is Itihad Liwa Shuhada Badr (Union of the Battalions of the Martyrs of Badr). Liwa Shuhada Badr's leader is Khalid bin Ahmad Siraj Ali (a.k.a. "Khalid Hayani"), who serves as the group's commander.

Hayani, 34, was born and raised in the northern Aleppo city district of Khaldiya to a family originally from Hayan, a northwestern suburb of the city (*al-Safir* [Beirut], November 12, 2013). Hayani, who is from an underprivileged background, is believed to have held a series of jobs prior to the start of the Syrian uprising, working as a diesel seller, a fishmonger and as a bodyguard at a night club. These jobs are believed to have involved him in sometimes violent disputes between the city's powerful mercantile class (*al-Safir* [Beirut], November 12, 2013). He has been a commentator for global, Arabic-language media on the conflict in Aleppo and is portrayed as a rebel commander who leads from the front-line, even to the extent of directing attacks against specific Syrian government-held neighborhoods. [1]

Hayani is a very controversial armed opposition leader. He has drawn a great deal of criticism and anger from Syrian opposition activists, rival rebel militias and the Assad government and its allies for reportedly directing his group to rob, attack and commit human rights abuses against civilians in and around Aleppo (*al-Safir* [Beirut], November 12, 2013; *Al-Monitor*, November 11, 2013). [2] Under



**General Khalifa Haftar:
His Enemies and Allies in the
Struggle for Libya**

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Hayani's command Liwa Shuhada Badr is believed to operate two prisons nicknamed "Guantanamo" and "Abu Ghraib" that hold Syrian opposition members, pro-Assad fighters and civilians in the northern Aleppo suburbs (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, November 29, 2013). Syrian opposition members from Aleppo's northern districts, where Liwa Shuhada Badr is most heavily concentrated, state that the group, like other rebel factions in the city, strongly discouraged relations between Arab and Kurdish opposition activists in civilian Local Coordinating Committees (LCCs), out of suspicion toward the Kurds and out of fear that the LCCs would undermine the group's power. [3] It is reported that Liwa Shuhada Badr operates the infamous "hell cannons," which are improvised mortar-type weapons that fire TNT out of large gas cylinders. These are notorious in Aleppo for being utilized against both pro-rebel and pro-Assad civilian districts (*al-Akhabar* [Beirut], January 6; *Al-Monitor*, November 11, 2013). [4]

Armed opposition groups, including ISIS, allege that they have seized narcotics, gas canisters used for Liwa Shuhada Badr's hell cannons and stolen jewelry and precious stones from the group's operating bases in Aleppo (*al-Khabar* [Damascus], November 2, 2013). In April, a coalition of Aleppo-based Syrian civilian activist groups declared that Hayani was a "butcher," encouraged Liwa Shuhada Badr fighters to leave his group and launched a campaign to lobby armed opposition groups in the city to arrest Hayani and prosecute him for alleged abuses against the city's civilians. These abuses include: directing his fighters to bombard civilians with conventional artillery and hell cannons, encouraging his fighters to rape civilian women and prisoners in Liwa Shuhada Badr prisons and seizing industrial machinery and laboratory equipment from factories and shops in Aleppo to be sold to Turkish businesses (*al-Nafir* [Damascus], April 22).

Liwa Shuhada Badr controls large areas of the formerly ethnically mixed northern Aleppo districts of Shaykh Maksoud, Bani Zayd, al-Khaldiya and Ashrafiya and is believed to have more than 3,000 fighters organized from towns northwest of Aleppo including Hayan, Bayanoun and Haraytan. [5] The group is an active combatant against the Syrian military and its auxiliaries in and around Aleppo. The rebel group recently battled against pro-Assad forces in western districts of Aleppo, including pro-Assad civilian areas, as a response to Syria's June presidential elections (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 2). It has been one of the fiercest opponents of the militant Salafist organization al-Dawlat al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa'l-Sham (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria – ISIS) in Aleppo. Omar al-Shishani, a Chechen Salafi-Jihadist veteran and the leader of the Chechen-majority ISIS

auxiliary fighting group Muhajareen Wa'l-Ansar (Emigrants and Partisans), has been a vocal and committed opponent of Hayani and has directed several attacks against Liwa Shuhada Badr positions in Aleppo city (al-Alam [Tehran], November 4, 2013). ISIS' campaign against Hayani and Liwa Shuhada Badr fighters in and around Aleppo city, including against members of Hayani's family in the village of Hayan, was part of a Fall 2013 effort to attack, capture and prosecute FSA-aligned armed groups associated with committing abuses against civilians (*Cham Times* [Damascus], November 1, 2013).

The ISIS campaign initially threatened to overwhelm Liwa Shuhada Badr's positions in the suburbs of northern Aleppo and forced the group to consolidate its positions in the city (*Al-Monitor*, November 11, 2013). Significant numbers of Liwa Shuhada Badr fighters, however, participated in an armed opposition's campaign against ISIS in and around Aleppo in January and February 2014 that dislodged the militant Salafist group from many areas of the city and its suburbs and it maintains uneasy relations with the largest anti-ISIS rebel factions in and around Aleppo, including the recently announced Amaliyyat Ghurfat Mushtarakat Ahl al-Sham (AGMAS – Joint Operations Room of the Syrians), which coordinates the Aleppo governorate military campaigns of the al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra (Victory Front), the powerful armed opposition coalitions al-Jabhat al-Islamiya (Islamic Front – IF) and al-Jaysh al-Mujahideen (Army of the Mujahideen). [6]

It is likely that ISIS will continue its campaign in eastern Aleppo governorate against the Syrian armed opposition in order to eventually seize control over the city. In spite of his infamous reputation, Hayani and his group have thus far been dedicated opponents against ISIS and are in control over several important districts of Aleppo city and the roads to the north out of it. As a result, it is unlikely in the near future that the armed opposition that opposes ISIS, especially the governorate's powerful AGMAS coalition, will move aggressively against Hayani who is a useful ally in the fighting against ISIS.

Notes

1. "Union of the Battalions of the Martyrs of Badr," Shero Kashosh YouTube page, February 17, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DuzLKnHOKUs>; "Aleppo, Al-Khaldiya-Khalid Hayani (General Commander of the Union of the Battalions of the Martyrs of Badr) – From the Battlefield – April 20, 2013," Halab wa Idlib YouTube page, April 20, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBETGvCuu1s>.
2. See also: "Al-Manar Channel-Aleppo Militia Terrorist

Khalid Hayani Perpetrated Massacres in the Neighborhood of ‘Ashrafiya,’ Shabakat Akhbar Sooria al-Mutahida FSNN-United Syrian News Network YouTube page, May 17, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPw9vRxQcw>; “Message from the Guardians of the Republic [Qadash Battalion] to the Dog Khalid Hayani,” Syria AssadHD YouTube page, January 1, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6JGyz23Qut8>.

3. Interviews conducted by the author with Syrians from Shaykh Maqsoud and Ashrafiya districts in Aleppo, interviews conducted in Gaziantep, Turkey in January and May 2014.

4. For a picture of a “hell cannon” see: “The Jehanem (Hell) Cannon With Gas Canisters Full of TNT That Rebels Use to Shell Residents in West Aleppo,” “Edward Dark” Twitter page, October 31, 2013, <https://twitter.com/edwardedark/status/396016466249531392/photo/1>.

5. Interviews conducted by the author with Syrians from Shaykh Maqsoud and Ashrafiya districts in Aleppo, interviews conducted in Gaziantep, Turkey in January and May 2014.

6. Ibid.

BATTLEFIELD ACCOMPLISHMENTS PROPEL SYRIAN REBEL LEADER ABD ALLAH AWDA TO EARN U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE

Nicholas A. Heras

Harakat Hazm (Movement of the Steadfast), a coalition of armed groups that is based in northwestern Syria near the Turkish border, is a potential recipient of the \$500 million of direct military assistance by the United States for “vetted” armed opposition groups in the Syrian conflict (AP, June 27). Harakat Hazm has reportedly already received a shipment of U.S.-manufactured BGM 71 TOW anti-tank missiles through another nation, likely Saudi Arabia or Turkey, with the approval of U.S. officials (Public Radio International, April 29; Reuters, April 15; AFP, April 15). The military commander of Harakat Hazm is First Lieutenant Abd Allah Awda (a.k.a. “Abu Zayd”). [1]

Awda supposedly served as an officer in the Syrian Army before defecting. [2] He gained notoriety early in the Syrian uprising when, in June 2011, al-Jazeera aired the video of his declaration of defection from the Syrian military to join the growing rebel movement as a result of his dissatisfaction with Syrian security forces’ attacks against civilians. [3] After his

defection, Awda helped to create and lead Harakat al-Dabat al-Ahrar (Free Officers’ Movement), an organization that preceded the formation of the Free Syrian Army (FSA). [4] In 2012, Awda announced the formation of Katiba al-Farouq al-Shmaal (Northern Farouq Brigade) in and around the town of Khan al-Subul in the northwestern Syrian governorate of Idlib. Katiba al-Farouq al-Shmaal was part of Kata’ib al-Farouq (Farouq Brigades), one of the first Syrian armed opposition coalitions that attempted to establish a national presence. [5] Arab media asserts that Kata’ib al-Farouq maintained close ties to the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (SMB) and through the SMB to the governments of Turkey and Qatar (*al-Akhbar* [Beirut], May 22).

As the military commander of Katiba al-Farouq al-Shmaal, Awda was an occasional commentator for Arab media outlets, for whom he would analyze the struggle for control over strategic areas, such as the M5 highway in Idlib and Aleppo governorates. [6] He had been the commander of the armed opposition groups that cooperated in a “joint operations room” in Idlib where Katiba al-Farouq al-Shmaal operated. [7] In December 2013, Katiba al-Farouq al-Shmaal, led by Awda, became a member in the armed opposition coalition al-Jabhat al-Thuwar al-Sooria (Syrian Revolutionaries’ Front – SRF), which included 14 constituent militias primarily based in the northwestern governorates of Idlib, Aleppo, Latakia and Hama (*al-Mokhtsar* [Riyadh], December 10, 2013). The SRF is led by Jamal Ma’rouf, another Idlib-based armed opposition commander, himself famous for being the first rebel fighter to shoot down a Syrian military plane. He has reportedly received military assistance from countries such as the United States, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, which are seeking the removal of Bashar al-Assad from power (AP, June 27; *Washington Post*, February 16; *al-Arabiya* [Dubai], December 29, 2012).

In January 2014, Awda led Katiba al-Farouq al-Shmaal in joint operations with Harakat Hazm against the Syrian military and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in a campaign called Geneve II (Geneva II), timed to coincide with the Geneva II peace talks between Syrian rebels and the Assad government in Switzerland. [8] He gave an interview to Arab media discussing his group’s participation in the Geneva II campaign and indicated that Katiba al-Farouq al-Shmaal was cooperating with, but was distinct from Harakat Hazm. [9] In late January, however, Harakat Hazm released a video announcing its existence, which named Awda as its military commander. [10] It is reported that a majority of the military and political leadership in Harakat Hazm were members of or associated with Katiba al-Farouq al-Shmaal (*al-Akhbar* [Beirut], May 22). Speaking to the U.S. journalist Liz Sly, Awda stated that he supports a democratically elected post-

Assad government that promotes equality and represents Syria's diversity, although he expects that government to be informed by Shari'a. He said that Harakat Hazm is:

A military movement capable of toppling the regime; protecting citizens and their property; and filling the void after the regime falls... a nationalistic, unifying mission to include all the Syrians, with their different backgrounds, in a military movement that will serve as the basis of a future army (*Washington Post*, April 28).

In spite of Harakat Hazm's reported relationship with foreign actors, including the United States, that are seeking the removal of Bashar al-Assad, it is probably not one of the more powerful rebel factions operating in northwestern Syria. Although Abd Allah Awda is a relatively well-known and experienced Syrian armed opposition leader, he may or may not appeal as a national rebel commander to other Syrian armed opposition groups. It is also unclear whether Harakat Hazm can become as powerful as the other armed opposition coalitions, such as the constituent militias of al-Jabhat al-Islamiya (Islamic Front – IF). Assuming continued assistance from the United States, it is more likely that Awda's position as an important local, rebel leader in northwestern Syria, particularly in Idlib, will be maintained and that he will cooperate in stability operations with rebel military and civilian organizations at the village and sub-governorate district level.

Notes

1. "Statement of the Formation of Harakat Hazm with the Blessing of the Chairman of the General Staff," al-Maktab al-Alami li-Quwat al-Thawra al-Sooria (Information Office of the Forces of the Syrian Revolution) YouTube page, January 25, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfIK7DkPQok>.
2. "Story of the Defection of First Lieutenant Abd Allah 'Awda, Commander of the Northern al-Farouq Brigade," Tayseer Bakru YouTube page, August 14, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ac6moXFtO1E&app=desktop>.
3. "Al-Jazeera: Defection of 1st Lieutenant Abd Allah 'Awda," Jabar Athrat al-Karam YouTube page, June 26, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VEAWj8M_yD4&app=desktop.
4. Op. cit.
5. "Formation of the Northern al-Farouq Brigade in the Idlib Countryside," Battalions Farouq YouTube page, August 4, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qLRLa17ASGM>.
6. "Al-Jazeera Report on the Northern al-Farouq Brigade," Tayseer Bakru YouTube page, August 17, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUSr1CdCtf8&app=desktop>.

7. "Al-'Arabiya-Syrian Media Center: The Northern al-Farouq Brigade's Military Base," al-Markaz al-Alami al-Soori (Syrian Media Center) YouTube page, December 24, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPRYsrY49rk>.
8. "Al-'Arabiya Channel Event-Presentation of 1st Lieutenant Abd Allah 'Awda Abu Zeid from the Northern al-Farouq Brigade," Shaam News Network, January 17, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2j4cI_yRr_k.
9. Ibid.
10. Op. cit.

Legendary Kashmiri Militant Mast Gul Reemerges After Long Hibernation

Animesh Roul

Pakistani militant commander Haroon Khan, better known as Mast Gul in the Indian subcontinent, has reemerged after a hibernation, perpetrating a string of terrorist attacks inside Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province this February. He is known for his long association with Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and his strong ideological linkages with the religious institution Jamaat-e-Islami. Mast Gul's brief but violent stint in Kashmir in the mid-1990s is now part of jihadist folklore. However, his deadly comeback as a Taliban commander has raised many eyebrows.

Reinventing himself as a senior Taliban leader, Mast Gul, along with *mufti* Hasaan Swati, the Peshawar district chief of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), addressed the press for the first time from their Miramshah hideouts in North Waziristan following the February 4 suicide attack on a Peshawar hotel. This hotel was frequented by the Shi'a populace in Qissa Khwani Market. The attack left at least nine people dead and scores injured. According to Swati, the hotel bombing was carried out by Mast Gul at the direction of senior TTP leader Shaykh Khalid Haqqani to avenge the November 2013 attack on the Taleem-ul-Quran *madrassa* (Islamic seminaries) (*Dawn* [Karachi], February 6). [1] Following this act of violence, Gul masterminded at least three more anti-Shi'a incidents. On February 23, an IED (Improvised Explosive Device) blast near the main gate of the Usterzai bus terminal in Kohat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, killed 13 people, mostly Shiites waiting to travel to areas of Usterzai and Sherkot (*Express Tribune* [Karachi], February 24). The very next day, another suicide bombing occurred just outside the Iranian Consulate in Peshawar, killing two Frontier Constabulary personnel and wounding nearly 10 people. Gul's spokesman Fidaullah Fida told the media that the group will "continue to target Iranian installations and the Shi'a community everywhere" (Reuters, February 24).

After Mast Gul's public transformation and his involvement in sectarian attacks inside Pakistan, his parent organization, Hezbul Mujahideen (HM), has distanced itself from him, stating that he had quit HM before 2001. It also condemned the attacks inside Pakistan, terming them "nefarious and against the tenets of Islam" (*Dawn* [Karachi], February 26).

Mast Gul's early life was a mystery until recent years. According to a Guantanamo Bay detainee, Gul was a major

in the Pakistani Army with ties to the ISI directorate and to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the leader of Hezb-e-Islami and a designated "global terrorist" by the United States (*Times of India*, May 9, 2011). Gul entered the Kashmir conflict theater in mid-1994 as a "guest militant" ("Mehmaan Mujahid"). Groups of these mujahideen, who were composed mostly of Islamist mercenaries from Afghanistan and Pakistan, were sent to reinvigorate the Kashmir conflict at the behest of Hezbul Mujahideen and its patron Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan. [2] In February 1995, Mast Gul entered Charar-e-Sharif in Jammu and Kashmir and consolidated his position, along with other militants, for a long battle with Indian security forces. His unsavory reputation as a merciless mercenary spread across the region when he besieged the historic shrine and tomb of Sufi saint Shaykh Noorudin Noorani in early May 1995. Using explosives and gas cylinders as incendiary devices, militants ignited a massive fire at the shrine. Following a prolonged standoff between Indian security forces and militants affiliated with Hezbul Mujahideen and Harkat ul-Ansar, Gul escaped to Pakistan on May 11, 1995, leaving behind a trail of destruction. His infamous last communication with Pakistani agencies said it all: "*mission khatam kar diya*" (mission accomplished). The main aims of the foreign mercenaries were to destroy the Sufi shrine, which was a symbol of Hindu and Muslim unity in Kashmir, and to trigger communal violence. [3] Twenty-seven were killed in the conflict. Gul was heartily welcomed upon his return to Pakistan. He attended congratulatory meetings at the Hezbul Mujahideen hideout in Pakistan-administered Kashmir (PAK) on May 26, 1995, where HM divisional commander Riyaz Rasul announced a monetary reward for his actions in Kashmir (Rediff.com, August 1, 2000).

In August that year, Mast Gul was seen in Muzaffarabad (PAK) and at Liaquat Bagh (Rawalpindi) along with then Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan Chief Qazi Hussain and Hezbul Mujahideen Chief Syed Salahuddin, addressing various victory rallies and calling for jihad to liberate Kashmir (Free Press Kashmir, March 10).

Embarrassed by his public appearances and speeches mentioning the destruction of the Charar-e-Sharif shrine and glorifying Kashmir violence, his Pakistani handlers reportedly ordered him to lie low. Not much is known regarding Mast Gul's activities inside Pakistan until an attempt on his life in Peshawar in late August 2003. Gul's brother, Ismail Khan, blamed India's external intelligence agency and three Afghanistan nationals, including former Afghan corps commander of Jalalabad Haji Zaman and Trade Commissioner Haji Aman, for the attack near Gul's residence in Peshawar (*Dawn* [Karachi], September 1, 2003). After falling out with Hezbul Mujahideen, Gul formed a

group known as Lashkar-i-Hisar (*Daily Times* [Lahore], September 1, 2003). Reports also suggest Mast Gul joined another Kashmir-centric militant group named al-Umar Mujahideen (AuM), which was founded by Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar, who was released from Indian prison in January 2000 (*Asian Age*, July 3, 2000). There are also speculations in the media that Mast Gul and *mufti* Hasan Swati are part of the larger Taliban splinter group Ahrar-ul-Hind (*News International* [Islamabad], February 13). However, Gul seems to have maintained a relatively low profile in the last decade and kept his whereabouts secret.

Like slain al-Qaeda commander Ilyas Kashmir, another former Pakistani soldier who turned against the state in the later stages of his jihadist career, Mast Gul is a proverbial Frankenstein's monster. With his recent acts and affiliations, it is more or less clear that Mast Gul is not concentrating on jihad in Kashmir; rather, he is focused on an anti-state and sectarian agenda akin to the ideology of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) or TTP. Why he has turned against his benefactors remains unknown. His sudden but violent reappearance on the jihadist landscape could make Pakistan rethink its practice of supporting militants like Mast Gul.

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Notes

1. The attacks on the Taleem-ul-Quran *madrassa* were perpetrated by angry mob belonging to the Shi'a community during the annual Ashura procession on November 15, 2013. The violence left at least 10 students of the *madrassa* dead and many more injured from both the communities (Shi'a and Sunni).
2. For a brief on Kashmir's Mehman Mujahideen, see Manoj Joshi, *The Lost Rebellion: Kashmir in the Nineties*, Penguin, 1999, p. 178.
3. "Of Shrines and Blackmail," 2001, http://www.kashmir-information.com/Chrar_Hazratbal.html.

A Brief Sketch of Khalid Mahsud: Mastermind Behind the Attack on Pakistan's Mehran Airbase

John C. K. Daly

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif told a session of the National Assembly on January 29 that his government would pursue peace negotiations with Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants in spite of a recent spate of attacks and named a four-member committee to facilitate these talks (*Dawn* [Karachi], January 29). Now a fracture in the TTP leadership is threatening the possibility of a lasting peace. A pro-peace talks faction based in South Waziristan split from the TTP due to personality differences between their leader Khalid Mahsud and the TTP leader Fazlullah whose supporters are not in favor of peace in Pakistan. A spokesperson for the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan-South Waziristan (TTP-SW), said that the organization would work under the leadership of Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Omar, noting, "The prime purpose of our organization is to fight alongside Afghan Taliban against the foreign forces in Afghanistan" (RFE/RL, May 30).

Khalid Mahsud Sajna

Sources close to Khalid Mahsud describe him as a skilled fighter with a great sense of humor, so devoted to his two wives that he ultimately earned the name Sajna (the beloved) (*The Nation* [Lahore], May 29). His alias Khan Said Sajna reflects this. Khalid Mahsud is a resident of Dwa Toi village in South Waziristan.

Khalid Mahsud is known to have been the mastermind behind the attack on the Pakistani Navy's Mehran airbase on May 22, 2011; two P-3C Orion maritime surveillance aircraft were destroyed and eight Pakistan Navy personnel and two Rangers were killed in the attack (*The News International* [Karachi], May 23, 2011). He also planned the April 15, 2012 TTP assault on Bannu prison, which released 384 prisoners (*The News International* [Islamabad], April 18, 2012). Following this audacious raid, Khalid Mahsud spent most of his time fighting in Afghanistan (Pakistan Today [Lahore], May 31).

The Mahsud tribe has a long history of resistance to non-Pashtun and governmental political control. During Britain's Afghan wars and the Waziristan Campaign of 1919-1920, the Mahsud tribe was regarded as "probably the most formidable fighting men on the Frontier... fiercely independent, their fighting skills honed by centuries

of raiding.” [1] Mahsud fighters make up the bulk of the TTP’s cadre, and until recently, dominated the leadership of the TTP. Mahsud tribesmen make up 70 percent of the local population in South Waziristan and the tribe also controls parts of North Waziristan, where the majority of foreign militants are based (*IHS Jane’s Country Risk Daily Report*, May 27).

Split with the TTP

The split follows a period of extensive factional infighting in the South Waziristan tribal area between TTP tribal commanders Khalid Mahsud and Shehryar Khan, a.k.a. Shehbaz (Awaz TV, May 29). The skirmishes began after the TTP’s ruling *shura* council met on November 2, 2013 to choose a new leader, one day after a U.S. drone strike killed TTP chief Hakimullah Mahsud (*The News International* [Islamabad], November 3, 2013). More than 100 militants have been killed during the clashes (Pakistan Today [Lahore], June 20). The current TTP leader, Fazlullah, has been unable to suppress these clashes because he is based in Afghanistan (*The News International* [Karachi], April 12).

In the aftermath of Hakimullah Mahsud’s death, Khalid Mahsud was the frontrunner for the TTP leadership because of his seniority in the TTP ranks and his influence among various Mahsud tribes of South and North Waziristan. Not unreasonably, Khalid Mahsud felt that his valor on the fields of Afghanistan had made him Baitullah’s heir. Khalid’s candidacy, however, faced strong opposition not only from the Fazlullah TTP faction, but also from the Hakimullah and the Omar Khalid, groups, mainly because of Mahsud’s pro-peace talks position (*The News International* [Karachi], November 8, 2013). Ultimately, Fazlullah was elected by the TTP’s 17-member *shura* as the new chief. Khalid Mahsud accepted a non-Mahsud and non-Waziristani as his *amir* because of the direct involvement of Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Omar, who personally intervened in the leadership selection process to avoid a split within the TTP (*The News International* [Islamabad], May 29).

In a sign of Fazlullah’s shaky overall control of the TTP, internal disagreements came to a head on May 14 when he fired Khalid Mahsud as the *amir* of the South Waziristan TTP chapter, only to have the TTP’s *shura* reject his decision four days later. Since he was in Afghanistan, Fazlullah did not attend the meeting (*The News International* [Islamabad], May 29). Many of the *shura* participants said that Fazlullah should not have behaved like a dictator by first making a decision and then asking the council to endorse it, while other members believed that Fazlullah was unable to manage

the TTP the way Baitullah and Hakimullah had in the past, primarily because of Fazlullah’s absence from the country (*The News International* [Islamabad], May 19).

After his firing, Khalid Mahsud accused TTP leaders of involvement in criminal activities and said in a May 28 statement issued to journalists:

[The TTP leadership] clique is involved in the heinous crimes of robbery, extortion, kidnapping for ransom and targeted assassinations. They have killed Islamic scholars and forced *madrasas* to pay them money and engage in orchestrating bomb blasts in public places after getting paid from outside the country... We have tried our level best for reforms and forging maximum unity within the TTP ranks but the gang of plotters seemed to have succeeded... We tried our best to stay united but failed (RFE/RL, May 30).

Khalid’s accusations will tarnish the TTP’s image in the public’s eyes. Mahsud’s charges appear plausible and confirm the beliefs of many Pakistanis that the TTP conducted many of the country’s kidnappings, killings, bombings, robberies and extortions under aliases, and that the promotion of a certain sect created rifts among the TTP, causing them to deviate from the real cause, jihad in Afghanistan, degenerating instead into criminal attacks on the Pakistani people instead. In contrast, the TTP-SW proclaimed its immense respect for shrines and other Islamic sites. The split also weakens Mullah Omar, who made considerable efforts to end the infighting and secure the support of TTP fighters for the Taliban’s annual spring offensive against foreign troops in Afghanistan, which has increased importance in light of the NATO troop drawdown.

Conclusion

The net result of Khalid Mahsud’s departure from the TTP has been to fracture the jihadi movement in Pakistan; if the Sharif government can keep Khalid Mahsud’s TTP-SW on the sidelines, then the Pakistani military’s Operation Zarb-e-Azb has a far greater chance of success. The TTP split is also a blessing for Pakistani intelligence, as it weakens the in-country jihadist threat.

As for Khalid Mahsud, the establishment of the TTP-SW has not only strengthened his influence amongst South Waziristan jihadists, but has also allowed him to garner the support of all 12 Mahsud tribal chiefs in North Waziristan. In evaluating Taliban efforts, Khalid Mahsud concluded that the TTP had lost sight of its original goal of expelling foreign invaders from Afghanistan and that the organization had

degenerated into a criminal campaign against the Pakistani people, with his fellow tribesmen in the FATA bearing the brunt of subsequent Pakistani military operations, a development he became determined to stop. His sense of betrayal ran deep, as a Mahsud had commanded the TTP from its founding in 2007 until Fazlullah was unexpectedly promoted. Pakistani government negotiator Rustam Shah Mohmand noted, "Since the Mahsud tribe had suffered the most in this decade-long insurgency, it believed the leadership should stay with them," adding that thousands of tribe members had lost their lives and have been displaced from their hometowns (*The News International* [Islamabad], May 29).

The TTP-SW Sajna group could now join the ranks of the "good Taliban" jihadist groups that do not fight within Pakistan, such as the outfit led by Gul Bahadur, which is active in Afghanistan. The split leaves the TTP much weakened and prone to further defections by regional groups and will likely to bring to the fore militant groups that are more amenable to peace talks with Pakistan, good news for Sharif's government, as tens of thousands of Pakistani civilians and soldiers have been killed in TTP attacks and military responses.

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Note

1. Brian Robson, *Crisis on the Frontier: The Third Afghan War and the Campaign in Waziristan 1919-20*, Gloucestershire: Spellmount, 2007, p. 149.

Dead or Alive - Sinai's Most Wanted: Shadi el-Manei

Muhammad Mansour

Egyptian security officials claimed that Shadi al-Manei, a leader of the Sinai-based militant group Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, was killed in an ambush set by tribesmen in Sinai on May 22 (al-Ahram, May 24). According to the police investigation, 15 men in vehicles and armed with automatic weapons attacked al-Manei's car to avenge the killings of tribesmen by his terror group. Egyptian officials also identified al-Manei as the leader of the terror group (CBS News, May 23). A statement from the al-Qaeda-inspired group claims that al-Manei is alive and that the government's account is a lie intended to drive a wedge between the group and tribesmen and to promote a fake military victory. [1]

Dead or Alive?

A Cairo-based newspaper reported the statement:

The security forces announced the killing of the group's leader, however, they do not know who the leader is. Before, they announced the killing of Abu Abdullah in a security raid. However, they knew about his killing from our announcement. Then they claim he is the leader of the group, however he was not a leader... Now they claim Shadi al-Manei is killed and that he is the leader of the group. However, he was not killed and he is not the group's leader (al-Shorouk [Cairo], May 25).

Another media source reported the statement accompanied by three pictures of al-Manei taken after the report that he was killed. One picture showed him reading news of his killing on a laptop, while another picture showed him standing with some blindfolded militants in front of a black al-Qaeda flag. Yet, Egyptian Prime Minister Muhammad Ibrahim insisted al-Manei was dead and said that DNA testing will prove his death (*al-Hayat* [London], May 27). Such confirmation has not been announced.

Other accounts both support and contradict the government's statement. Muhammad Hamza, the head of the Middle East Forum for Strategic Studies, claimed that al-Manei was killed by some Bedouin from Sinai in retaliation for the killing of more than 11 tribal chiefs. [2] Mona Elzamlout, a journalist based in Sinai, told the author that Shadi al-Manei is not dead. [3]

Background

Al-Manei is a member of the Sawarka tribe, which is one of the biggest in Sinai but it also extends into Gaza (Akhbar al-Youm, May 23). Some reports claim that he was involved in the 2005 Sharm al-Shaykh bombing that left up to 88 tourists killed and another 200 injured, making the attack the deadliest terrorist action in the country's history (BBC, July 23, 2005). The Abdullah Azzam Brigades were the first to claim responsibility for the attacks: "Holy warriors targeted the Ghazala Gardens Hotel and the Old Market in Sharm el-Shaykh," said their website. They also claimed al-Qaeda connections. Egypt's Interior Ministry announced in November 2013 that al-Manei was a member of the group security forces arrested him (*El Watan* [Algiers], November 22, 2013; see *Terrorism Monitor*, December 3, 2013).

Following the 18-day uprising that overthrew Mubarak in 2011, al-Manei was one of a group of inmates who escaped prison and was one of the key figures who formed Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis as a militant group tasked with establishing an Islamic state in the Sinai. Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis is the latest branch of al-Qaeda to be established in Egypt. Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri's brother, Muhammad, was one of the jihadists released after the revolution and is believed to be involved with the radical group (*al-Ahram Weekly*, August 15, 2013).

The 26-year-old al-Manei reentered the spotlight after kidnapping seven Egyptian Army soldiers in May 2013 to pressure the government to release a number of detainees, including Hamada Abo Shita, who were arrested in the wake of the Taba bombings on October 7, 2004, that left 34 tourists killed and 171 injured (*al-Wafd* [Giza], September 11, 2013).

Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis' most brutal attack was on August 19, 2013. Militants in Rafah stopped two army vehicles carrying 25 soldiers who were shot execution style. The army has since stepped up security in Sinai and the group has turned to smaller drive-by shootings against army checkpoints. At a September 19, 2013 press conference, an army spokesman vowed the armed forces would continue their Sinai operation until all terrorists and outlaws were cleared (CNN, August 19, 2013)

The deaths of more than 200 Egyptian soldiers and officials have been blamed on Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis since Muhammad Mursi was ousted as president in July 2013. Since then, the military has led a massive crackdown against the Muslim Brotherhood – at least 16,000 Mursi supporters have been jailed, as have Mursi and most other senior leaders. Hundreds have been killed during protests since

July. In response, the Sinai-based jihadists have escalated their operations targeting military soldiers, who are mostly conscripts, and left the Sinai to attack police in the mainland, bombing security headquarters in Cairo and Mansoura (CBC/AP May 23).

On February 16, 2014, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis shifted its strategy away from targeting army soldiers and police installations toward attacking the tourist industry, one of Egypt's largest sources of income. Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis claimed responsibility for the bombing of a bus in Taba that killed four people, including three Korean tourists and an Egyptian bus driver. The group also warned all tourists to leave Egypt before February 20 (Mada Masr, May 4).

Conclusion

Whether or not al-Manei is dead is mostly irrelevant. His death would not weaken Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis since there are others in the group who can lead as well as he did and the group's strategy and terrorist operations have not changed. If the news of his death is incorrect, however, the Egyptian government's failure to dismantle this extremist network will be exposed. Unlike previous terrorist groups in Egypt, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis is recruiting foreign fighters, making Egyptian actions against them all the more important.

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Notes

1. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=knUaPZmPyUY>.
2. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzACZicND4g>.
3. Author's interview with Mona Elzamlout, on June 15.

Another Look at General Khalifa Haftar: Enemies and Allies in the Struggle for Libya

Dario Cristiani

Over the past few months, General Khalifa Haftar has been one of the most important figures in the Libyan political landscape. He has recently launched a “bid” of sorts to assume a role as a strongman for Libya, showing the ability to boost consensus and bring instability to an end. The Jamestown Foundation’s Militant Leadership Monitor profiled Khalifa Haftar in 2011 in the early stages of the Libyan revolution that toppled Mu’ammār Qaddafi in October 2011. It was already clear that Haftar was a central element of the emerging opposition front, although his personal history and relations made him rather controversial. For many years, Haftar had been the commander-in-exile of the Libyan National Army (LNA), the armed wing of the National Front for the Salvation of Libya (NFSL). This was an exiled Libyan group, operating outside of Libya’s borders for several decades with significant support from the CIA. This helped Haftar escape from Chad when the rapprochement between Chad and Libya put his life at risk in 1991 (See Militant Leadership Monitor, March 2011).

After living in Virginia for about 20 years, Haftar returned to Libya in March 2011 to join the revolutionary ranks. In August 2011, he became the leader of the ground forces of the Libyan Army. At that time, with the progressive weakening of Qaddafi’s regime, the fall of Tripoli in August 2011 and Qaddafi’s death in October 2011, the first strains among the rebel forces started to emerge. The end of the regime eliminated the groups’ common threat and their ideological differences and divergent political ambitions became more apparent (al-Arabiya, May 24). Haftar was one of the most outspoken critics of Islamist militias, which were particularly strong in those areas where he retains a powerbase. In December 2011, he avoided an assassination attempt by a Zintan-based militia (Reuters, December 12, 2011). Since then he has worked to increase his support within Libya, particularly with the army, local militias and tribes. The rise of the Islamists prompted a reaction by Haftar and his men and his moves became bolder and more resolute. On February 14, 2014, Haftar appeared on television to announce that the army was taking over and suspending the General National Congress (GNC), whose mandate was about to expire. He denied this was a coup attempt (see Terrorism Monitor, May 30).

On May 16, Haftar launched Operation Dignity in Benghazi. His aim was to “cleanse the city of terrorists” (al-Arabiya, May 21). His rhetoric was intended to frame the Libyan situation in a wider context, where regional powers are competing for influence, especially in those countries that underwent revolution during the Arab Spring. His continuous references to defeating the terrorist threat within Libya demonstrate his ambition of becoming an interlocutor for those countries that fear radical forces coming to power. Operation Dignity came about three months after Haftar’s coup in Tripoli. Since the previous profile has already focused on the personal history of Haftar and the strategic deployment of his actions, this article will explain the internal and external actors that either support or combat Haftar.

Haftar and the Libyan Political Landscape

Building trust and consensus within the fragmented Libyan political landscape is a rather complex task. The dominance and centrality of local communities and the resilience of tribal networks make cooperation among Libyan social groups unlikely. Cooperation has generally been achieved under the presence of a significant threat as was the case with Italian colonial ambitions in the first decades of 20th century and Qaddafi’s removal in 2011. Over the past three years, however, local groups have had no interest in giving up on their requests and, above all, their weapons, which makes obtaining the support of a significant number of different social and political groups in Libya particularly difficult.

The general has been able to assemble backing from groups in different areas of the country; for instance, some groups in Tobruq and Sirte are collaborating with him. The latter are particularly important, since Sirte was one of the major strongholds of Qaddafi loyalists. Moreover, he has been able to gain the support of a number of influential tribes, such as al-Ubaydat, al-Bara’isa and al-Awaqir e al-Arfa (*Limes* [Rome], May 29). Ibrahim al-Jadhran, the controversial leader of the Barqa council in Cyrenaica (eastern Libya) and one of those responsible for the current oil shutdown in Libya, seems to be particularly close to Haftar (Libya Monitor, May 20). Haftar is exploiting widespread feelings of discontent in eastern Libya against both the government, which is accused of being too Tripoli-centric and incapable of guaranteeing stability, and radical Islamist forces, who are increasingly seen as a threat by some moderate groups. He also has the support of the Qaqa group, made up mostly of western Libyans, who trained in Zintan during the 2011 conflict, and the Tripoli-based al-Sawaiq and Madani brigades, as well as some small sectors of the Misrata tribe. The most pro-Islamist oriented among them are at odds with the general (*al-Ahram Weekly* [Cairo], June 5). Moreover,

Haftar's alliance now includes the military intelligence service, police forces and the air force (al-Arabiya, May 23). In contrast, the general has particularly bad relationships with the powerful Misrata militia and all the different Libyan Islamists, primarily the Muslim Brotherhood and Ansar al-Shari'a, who have been Haftar's targets (al-Ahram [Cairo], May 20; al-Sharq al-Awsat, May 23; Libya Herald, June 15).

Haftar and the Regional and International Landscape

Haftar has realized that the international community is more favorable than a few months ago to the rise of a potential strongman in Libya. He wants to use the interests of external players to achieve additional support, although many remain cautious in openly supporting the general.

For a number of reasons, the developments in Libya have a wider regional and international significance. First, the situation of chaos that is engulfing Libya has some serious effects on the global economy, since it is one of the factors that is increasing the price of oil. Libyan instability translates to problems concerning oil production and export. For nearly a year, the Libyan oil sector has been at a standstill. Problems in the oil sector have implications for the internal stability of the country: Libya relies on oil revenue to pay public workers and militiamen and since many of its foreign exchange reserves are invested in financial assets that cannot be mobilized immediately, the budget crisis associated with the oil crisis and political instability is fueling discontent and radicalization (see Terrorism Monitor, April 4). Moreover, some parts of Libyan territory are lawless; local tribes and groups have *de facto* sovereign control in some parts of the country (see Terrorism Monitor, January 25, 2013). This was also the case in the east and one of the elements prompting Haftar's actions. Benghazi and its surrounding area were turning into a regional jihadist hotspot. Ansar al-Shari'a and other small Islamist-oriented militias have a significant presence there and there have been allegations concerning their logistic and operational linkages with regional organizations, especially al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (Reuters, August 9, 2013). Moreover, eastern Libya is turning into a hub for the movement and training of North African jihadists headed to Syria, the conflict *du jour* for jihadists (al-Akhbar [Beirut], March 8, 2012; see Terrorism Monitor, January 9). As such, a number of actors have an interest in reducing Libyan instability to curb the possible negative regional spillover.

Neighboring countries have a major interest in keeping Libya afloat. Otherwise, an eventual implosion may result in some major consequences. Egypt to the east and Algeria to the west are increasingly pro-active in tackling the threats emanating

from Libya. Algeria has allegedly mobilized a significant number of soldiers, weaponry and modern equipment in order to operate in Libya, although the government has not confirmed its direct involvement on the Libyan ground (*El Watan* [Algiers], June 6). Egypt is concerned about weapons heading into the Sinai, but has not mobilized soldiers and weapons in order to operate in Libya. Both countries have denied direct involvement with Haftar's operation despite a number of allegations stating that Haftar and his entourage have been in touch with both Egypt and Algeria (ANSamed, May 20; *Tout Sur L'Algérie*, May 26). In a way, especially in the case of Egypt, Haftar's rhetoric against Islamist forces – not only Ansar al-Shari'a, but also the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood – and his recent moves could have promoted the idea that he is trying to imitate al-Sisi and Egypt.

Haftar seems to enjoy support from other external actors. The UAE are allegedly finally supporting him and their press as well as outlets in Saudi Arabia have provided extensive coverage to his operations (see Terrorism Monitor, May 30; Middle East Monitor, May 18). In June, however, Haftar ordered citizens from Turkey and Qatar to leave eastern Libya and accused both countries of "supporting terrorism" (Gulf News, June 22). These two countries are closest to the Muslim Brotherhood in the region. As such, it is easy to spot a new confrontation between MENA countries, with Egypt, Algeria, Saudi Arabia and the UAE on one side and Turkey and Qatar on the other. Within the first group, none of these countries claim to directly support Haftar, fearing a possible backlash within Libya. Nevertheless, they share many of the aims and goals of the general, so it is possible to imagine some sort of tactical and tacit agreement between them and the Haftar's forces.

That is the same for the United States, although the country has officially defined any involvement with Haftar's action. Shortly after the launch of Operation Dignity, a spokesman for the State Department said that: "We have not had contact with [Haftar] recently. We do not condone or support the actions on the ground, nor have we assisted with these actions," and called upon all parties to "refrain from violence and find a peaceful solution" (Reuters, May 20). However, some American military actions in the Mediterranean that occurred in the same period suggest that the United States knew conditions on the ground (Reuters, May 19; al-Arabiya, May 27.). They perceive the emergence of a strong man in Libya as a possible solution to reducing and containing instability in the country, similar to what happened in Egypt with al-Sisi.

Conclusions

Haftar remains a rather controversial figure in the fragmented landscape of Libyan politics. He has been able to create a rather wide coalition, using local relations and exploiting the discontent of many people, especially in the east, against the government. After the initial post-revolutionary confidence, many people are unhappy with the rising instability. Moreover, in the east, the existence of a distinct, pro-autonomy sentiment and the perception that, despite the end of the old regime, the government remains always too “Tripoli-centered” make many groups there ready to criticize the government. While some of these groups are radical Islamist militants that perceive Libya to be a national political battlefield and playground for global jihad, others are people simply fed up with the government. Haftar seems to enjoy some external support since the future of Libya is key to a number of regional and international issues, especially concerning oil and economic security. However, almost all the countries that share interests with him are rather careful in openly backing the general since Libyans are skeptical of any foreign interference. These nations fear that, if Operation Dignity is unsuccessful, this could harm their options in the country. Almost all the foreign actors with interests in Libya have stressed the concept of a “Libyan solution to Libyan problems.” Some may perceive Haftar as part of the solution, but they do not want their support to backfire if he proves to be the part of the problem.

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