Al-Qaeda in Sudan – A Failure or Success?

By Moshe Terdman

Introduction – The Three-Phase plan

On December 28, 2006, an initial group of 25 uniformed UN personnel, comprising of thirteen military staff officers and twelve police officers, arrived in Darfur to support an African Union (AU) mission (AMIS) that has been working to monitor the area. The arrival of the UN personnel in Darfur was part of the three-phase plan, agreed to at the summits held

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1 See on-line in: http://allafrica.com/stories/200612290080.html
in Addis Ababa and Abuja in November 2006, which culminates in the hybrid operation of UN and African Union troops replacing the existing and understaffed AMIS. The new force is expected to have about 17,000 troops and 3,000 police officers. Under the first phase of the agreement, the UN provides a $21 million "light support package" to AMIS, which includes the provision of equipment as well as military advisers, police officers and civilian staff from the UN mission in Sudan (UNMIS). UNMIS is a separate peacekeeping operation mandated to oversee the peace pact ending the 21-year war between the South and the North. Phase two of the UN support to AMIS in Darfur will consist of a "heavy support package", including additional staff and equipment.2

This three-phase plan was a result of much diplomatic action, which centered throughout 2006 on attempts to persuade the Sudanese government and President Omar al-Bashir to agree that AMIS should be replaced or augmented by a United Nations peacekeeping mission with a stronger mandate. These attempts were based on two realities prevailing throughout the year: that the African Union force was neither resourced nor mandated appropriately to deal with the intensification of the conflict in Darfur, and that the humanitarian impact of the war had reached such an alarming level that many international aid agencies were ceasing operations there.

Still, in 2007, the Sudanese government has yet to commit fully to UN involvement in Darfur. Despite UN Security Council Resolution 1706, from August 31, 2006, which called for a "hybrid force" to be commanded ultimately by the UN, the situation remains unchanged. In effect, what was agreed upon was a three-phased plan, with a progression from light to heavy support culminating finally in a "hybrid operation". This "hybrid operation" remains essentially confined to technical assistance to AMIS from the UN. This was agreed upon at the High Level Consultation on Darfur held in Addis Ababa on November 16, 2006. It is important to stress that this operation was "agreed in principle" and that there is no consensus yet on the size of the force, the command of these forces, and the mandate of the deployed troops. Moreover, the Addis Ababa document contains no time-frame for deployment of significant new military and protection resources to Darfur, nor even a firm deadline for resolution of the critical issues that remain undetermined. Furthermore, it was agreed upon at Addis Ababa that "the Darfur Peace Agreement is the only basis for [the political process to resolve the Darfur conflict], and should not be re-negotiated".3

The Darfur Peace Agreement was signed on May 5, 2006, between the government of Sudan and the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) in Abuja, Nigeria. The agreement, however, does not include the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), or a breakaway of the Sudan Liberation Army.4

Despite the fact that the US and UN have hailed Sudanese "acceptance" of a hybrid operation as a success, in view of the above-said, nothing significant has changed in Sudan's position on UN peacekeepers. Sudan made clear that it has not changed its position and will only

4 See on-line in: http://www.e-prism.org/images/Islam_in_Africa_Newsletter_-_no1_-_May06.pdf
accept an African force and African leadership of a UN-AU peacekeeping mission. Sudan has also continued to emphasize that any operation should place the Sudanese government on equal footing with the AU and UN in organizing the initiative and provide it with veto power.

Thus, the political crisis in Sudan will not be resolved until peace is addressed in a comprehensive way, one that includes non-signatories to the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) and indeed takes account of the instability on the borders of Sudan with Chad. Should the DPA in its current form be taken as the definitive text for peace in the whole Darfur region, the violence against non-signatories is unlikely to end. Thus, despite unprecedented global activism on behalf of the people of Darfur in 2006, atrocities continue to occur daily in the region.

The arrival of the UN personnel in Darfur comprised even a sort of a "slap in the face" and a challenge for bin Laden as well as for al-Qaeda. Thus, it is not surprising to find in the Jihadi forums a detailed report, dated December 28, 2006, concerning the arrival of the UN personnel in Darfur. According to this report, the allowance of entry of UN personnel into Darfur was presented as a result of Western threats of imposing commercial embargo on Sudan and banning flights over Darfur. At the bottom of the report, it was requested from the forum's participants to circulate again the bin Laden audiotape calling the Mujahideen to defend Darfur against the Crusaders. On December 18, 2006, another report was circulated in the Jihadi forums, trying to explain what was going on in Darfur. At the end of this report appeared a question asking whether someone responds to the call of bin Laden to fight the crusaders in Sudan and Africa.5

Al-Qaeda vs. UN Peacekeeping Force in Darfur
On April 23, 2006, al-Jazirah TV channel broadcasted Bin Laden’s audiotape in which he called "on Mujahideen and their supporters, especially in Sudan and the Arabian peninsula, to prepare for a long war against the Crusader plunderers in Western Sudan." He further said that "our goal is not to defend the Khartoum government but to defend Islam, its lands and its people".6

Following the publication of the bin Laden audiotape, it seems that the interest in Darfur grew among the Mujahideen, who raised many questions in the Jihadi forums concerning Darfur and how to reach it. Hence, a participant in al-Hisbah forum answered some of those questions in a long article, published on May 17, 2006, and titled "To All Those who Wish to Reach Darfur", which was circulated in many other Jihadi forums too.7

5 See on-line in: http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=29c80dfdd0ddbf897f7a27caa94a170&threadid=47805
http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=29c80dfdd0ddbf897f7a27caa94a170&threadid=47625


On June 6, 2006, further information concerning Sudan was circulated in the Jihadi forums under the title: "From Here Stretches the Way to Darfur (Some Maps and Information that will be of interest to the Mujahideen Alone)". This information included maps, by which the author explained to his audience how to reach Darfur and where it is located within Sudan.8

Then, the interest on Darfur in the Jihadi forums dropped, only to rise again in September 29, 2006, with Ayman al-Zawahiri’s videotape, which was broadcasted and circulated in the Jihadi forums. In his videotape, al-Zawahiri criticized the United Nations for its proposal to send peacekeepers into Darfur to quell the violence there. He called the Sudanese government, which rejected the proposal but expressed interest in bolstering the African Union forces there, as "deceitful and hypocritical". He further called his audience "Rise, O Muslim nation, to defend your land and your honor from the crusaders' aggression which is now hiding behind the masks of the United Nations… Nothing will protect you but a Jihadi popular war to be led by the Mujahideen".9

Three days after the appearance of al-Zawahiri videotape, an article was circulated in the Jihadi forums calling whoever wishes to go to Darfur, to go there through the Libyan border, since al-Qaeda's Libyan members or supporters prepared the way for them.10 This small article was very significant, if it was true, since it hinted at the activity of the al-Qaeda's Libyan members or supporters in connection with Darfur, for which there is no other evidence available.

On October 18, 2006, the news about the Sudanese government opening a new Jihad theater in Darfur spread like fire throughout the Jihadi forums. According to the news, the Sudanese government erected ten training camps for Arab and foreign volunteers, located in Khartoum and Darfur. Following the news, a plea was made to all those who can't go to Iraq or Palestine, to travel to Darfur instead.11 From an examination of other sources, there is no other proof for this Sudanese erection of training camps for Mujahideen, so it might be only an exercise in disinformation in order to influence the Mujahideen to travel to Darfur, instead of Iraq or Palestine.

Those who decide to travel to Darfur are promised to be supported by the Salafi infrastructure already in existence in Sudan. Here follows a unique description of the Salafi structure in Sudan, circulated in the Jihadi forums. According to this description, the largest Salafi presence is in Qassala in east Sudan. The second largest Salafi concentration in Sudan is located in Khartoum. And, most recently, the Salafi elements reached Darfur too.12

Then, the anonymous author gave a very detailed and unique description of the Salafi groups operating in Sudan. These included:

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8 See on-line: http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=cc363822a2968e4a1351e8dc91
11 See on line in: http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=29c80dfddd0ddbf897f7a27caa94a170&threadid=46255
12 See on-line in: http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=cc363822a2968e4a1351e8dc91
1. Jama'at Ansar al-Sunnah al-Muhammadiyah, which is among the largest groups operating in Sudan today, and which is spread all over the country. The group is divided into two factions under the same name: the first one is comprised of al-Hudayah clan and joined the regime, while the second is comprised of the Abu Zayd clan, which did not join the regime.

2. Jama'at al-Kitabah Wal-Sunnah al-Khayriyyah, which is the second largest Salafi group operating in Sudan.

3. Jama'at al-I'tisam bil-Kitab wal-Sunnah, which is the third largest Salafi group operating in Sudan.

4. Al-Salafiyyun, who are nicknamed al-Safanjiyyah due to their concentration in the al-Safiyyah quarter in Khartoum. They consider the activity within a group as a deviation from religion.

5. A number of sheikhs, or Salafi religious scholars, who preach alone without involving themselves in the conflicts, which take place from time to time between the other groups.¹³

It is interesting to note that nothing is known about these groups. Still, it is most likely that they were formed while bin Laden was in Sudan or sometimes in the 1990s or 2000s. They were formed whether due to Salafi influence from Saudi Arabia penetrating Sudan by way of the Red Sea, and thus, that explains why most Salafis are located in eastern Sudan, or due to some Muslim Sudanese who volunteered to fight in Afghanistan alongside the Jihadis, and while there, were influenced by Salafi ideas.

In addition, there was an Islamist infrastructure operating in Darfur even before bin Laden's broadcast, on which the Mujahideen arriving in Sudan can count on for help. The Islamists and Salafis operating in Darfur established the Darfur Jihad Organization. Its first memorandum was published on March 9, 2006, in the Sudanese Online forum. It was called "The Establishment Announcement of the Darfur Jihad Movement for Stopping the Foreign Involvement".¹⁴

According to this announcement, the goals of this movement are as follows:

- Preventing the foreign involvement in Darfur while using all the legal means contained in the religion of Islam.
- Struggling against the organizations, which do not serve the Sudanese homeland or the civilians.
- Protecting the religion of Islam, the traditions and the customs from the influence of the foreign presence in Darfur.

¹³ See on-line in: [http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=cc363822a2968e4a1351e8de91](http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=cc363822a2968e4a1351e8de91)
¹⁴ See on-line: [http://www.sudaneseonline.com/cgi-bin/sdb/2bb.cgi?seq=msg&board=50&msg=1141](http://www.sudaneseonline.com/cgi-bin/sdb/2bb.cgi?seq=msg&board=50&msg=1141)
Protecting the unity of the land and the relationships between the Darfurian society and its cultural and ethnic components.  

Then, the announcement continues and specifies the means to achieve these aims:

- Struggling against the foreign involvement with all the possible means at hand.
- Launching an armed struggle by proclaiming Jihad, but not as a part of the resistance organizations or the Sudanese government operating in Darfur.
- Coordination with all the Jihadi organizations active in the Islamic world in order to achieve a unity of aims and means with them.
- Warning the Sudanese government to let its civilians keep their religion and homeland unless it wishes the organization to attack it.
- Warning the armed groups not to accept the "imperialist" foreign involvement, unless they wish to be its first target.
- Warning all the political parties that if they coordinate or take any measure to assist the "imperialism" to enter Darfur, they will pay the price.
- Warning all the foreign organizations to stop meddling in Darfur.
- Warning the African Union mission, perceived by the organization as an enemy dressed as a friend, to stop encouraging the "imperialists" to enter Darfur.

At the end of the announcement, the Darfur Jihad Organization proclaims that its ranks are open to everyone who shares its aims and that it is a Darfurian organization, established in Darfur and operating solely for Darfur.

The leader of this organization is Abu Jihad al-Darfuri. In an interview to al-Intibahah, a Sudanese daily newspaper, which was held on March 27, 2006, Abu Jihad stressed again the aims of his organization, which are to protect Darfur from Foreign involvement and occupation as happened in Afghanistan and Iraq. He called the Darfurian people to be patient and hold on. He refused, however, to contribute any information whatsoever on its relations with al-Qaeda.

Besides the Darfur Jihad Organization, there is another organization active in Darfur, or in Sudan at large, called the Blood Brigades. Its aim is the same as that of the Darfur Jihad Organization. Nothing else is known about both organizations. Their names did not show up in connection with Darfur or Sudan. So, it might be that those organizations are very small and guard their secrecy well or, alternatively, that they broke up and mingled with larger organizations or factions active in Darfur.

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15 See on-line in: [http://www.sudaneseonline.com/cgi-bin/sdb/2bb.cgi?seq=msg&board=50&msg=1141](http://www.sudaneseonline.com/cgi-bin/sdb/2bb.cgi?seq=msg&board=50&msg=1141)
16 See on-line in: [http://www.sudaneseonline.com/cgi-bin/sdb/2bb.cgi?seq=msg&board=50&msg=1141](http://www.sudaneseonline.com/cgi-bin/sdb/2bb.cgi?seq=msg&board=50&msg=1141)
17 See on-line in: [http://www.sudaneseonline.com/cgi-bin/sdb/2bb.cgi?seq=msg&board=50&msg=1141](http://www.sudaneseonline.com/cgi-bin/sdb/2bb.cgi?seq=msg&board=50&msg=1141)
19 See on-line: [http://wwwnotes.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/480fa8736b88bbc3e12564f6004c8ad5/df545](http://wwwnotes.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/480fa8736b88bbc3e12564f6004c8ad5/df545)
The most surprising offer given to those Mujahideen who decide to travel to Darfur was to ally themselves with members of the Sufi Tijaniyyah sect and to count on them for help.20 This Salafi pragmatic approach towards the Sufis should surprise us, since the Salafis perceive the Sufis as their greatest enemies. But in Africa most Muslims are Sufis, and the term Jihad is not alien to them. Sufis in West Africa fought in what was termed in history as the "Jihad Wars" from the beginning of the nineteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth century. Sufis in East Africa fought against the colonial occupation in the end of the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth century. Thus, the Mujahideen are directed to ally themselves with members of the Tijaniyyah sect, due to its long history of struggle against the French colonialism in West and Central Africa.

However, all the efforts to convince the Mujahideen to travel to Darfur were in vain. Thus, when the UN personnel arrived in Darfur on December 28, 2006, there was no one from al-Qaeda to challenge them. What are the reasons for that?

What Went Wrong?
In order to understand what went wrong, one has to go back in time to the broadcast of the bin Laden audiotape on April 23, 2006. In response to this massage, the Islamist JEM rejected bin Laden's appeal since the real danger comes from Khartoum, "which is a Muslim government killing other Muslims." The SLA declared the aim of bin Laden is to "exterminate the peoples of Darfur." Even the Sudanese government announced that Sudan would not play host to terrorists.21

Indeed, bin Laden was in Sudan from 1991 to 1996. His presence there was made possible by Hasan al-Turabi, who was regarded then as the real power behind the presidency. Since then, al-Turabi's influence on the government waned and, in the last years he was put in prison or under house arrest. Moreover, he was even accused of heresy for his recently declared liberal views on the role of women in Islamic society. This attitude towards al-Turabi is also reflected in Jihadi forums. For example, on June 7, 2006, an article was circulated in the Jihadi forums that attacked al-Turabi for saying that there is "no prohibition for a Christian or a woman to be nominated to the presidency in Sudan as long as the candidates are honest and pure".22

The Sudanese government underwent some significant changes too. Under the provisions of the peace treaty with the South, Christians from South Sudan occupy now leading positions in the administration. Neither Omar al-Bashir nor his government endorses the idea of al-Qaeda members fighting in Sudan against a UN peacekeeping mission in Darfur.23

The Sudanese government aligned itself closely with the United States in the war on terrorism. Thus, allowing al-Qaeda members back in Sudan might be regarded by the US as a

22 See on-line: http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=a668364222e90e0b74c1d6e83e45f21&threadid=42133
Sudanese shift back to supporting terrorism. Furthermore, most Sudanese are Sufis and do not support the Wahhabist-style Islam espoused by al-Qaeda.\(^{24}\)

Under these circumstances, one should regard the whole notion of al-Qaeda in Sudan as a total failure. Is it really so?

**Al-Qaeda in Sudan – a Summary**

On September 13, 2006, a previously unknown group called Al-Qaeda in Sudan and Africa claimed responsibility for kidnapping and beheading the chief editor of *Al-Wifaq*, a Sudanese independent daily eight days earlier, on September 5. The statement said that "thanks to god's grace…execution was carried out against a dog of the dogs of the ruling party, the atheist journalist Mohammad Taha, who defamed our prophet Muhammad". The statement further said that he was "slaughtered" by three members of the group, who allegedly had fled Khartoum on September 7. The statement was signed by "Abu Hafs al-Sudani", identified as the group's leader. This statement was spread in Jihadi forums as well as in the global press.\(^{25}\)

The murder of Mohammad Ahmad Taha Jankal was the fourth attempt on his life. It involved – for the first time in the history of terrorism in Sudan – the beheading of a person in the "Jihadi Iraqi" style. Muhammad Taha was regarded a pro-Iranian Islamist, who was influenced by the Islamic revolution in Iran. In May 2005 he offended the Islamists by republishing an article from the internet that questioned the ancestry of the Prophet Muhammad. As a result, scores of Sudanese gathered in front of the capital's courthouse demanding a death sentence for Muhammad Taha. However, he was detained for several days; his paper was closed for three months, and fined 8 million Sudanese pounds. About six-months ago, unidentified assailants set fire to the offices of *Al-Wifaq*, badly damaging the building.\(^{26}\)

This was presented as the first operation of al-Qaeda, or its branch, in Sudan. As a matter of fact, a short statement announcing the establishment of Al-Qaeda Organization in Sudan, under the leadership of Sheikh Abu Y'ali or Y'uli was circulated in Jihadi forums already on July 4, 2006. According to that very short statement, this organization was trained to action and as for the time being, was waiting instructions.\(^{27}\)

In this regard, one has to ask whether the al-Qaeda Organization in Sudan is really affiliated with bin Laden's al-Qaeda or is it an Islamist organization emulating al-Qaeda methods. Be that as it may, the important issue to stress here is that al-Qaeda's influence has reached Sudan. It is difficult to guess who leads al-Qaeda Organization in Sudan and even more so


\(^{25}\) See on-line at: [http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=8014a639c44b14993a078e99a5a38ab9&threadid=45375](http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=8014a639c44b14993a078e99a5a38ab9&threadid=45375); [http://www.sudaneseonline.org/forum/viewtopic.php?t=9852&sid=c4aa7f801ead34dab99fe71d0d3b6](http://www.sudaneseonline.org/forum/viewtopic.php?t=9852&sid=c4aa7f801ead34dab99fe71d0d3b6); [http://newsinfo.inq7.net/breakingnews/world/view_article.php?article_id=20747](http://newsinfo.inq7.net/breakingnews/world/view_article.php?article_id=20747)


who are its members. These are most likely local Sudanese, since the call of bin Laden has seemed to be heeded by only a few of al-Qaeda members, if at all.

If it is really the case, then Africa, and the whole Muslim world with it, faces a very worrying and serious phenomenon of the spread of al-Qaeda's methods throughout the world. This spread of methods does not need anyone from al-Qaeda proper to do it. The films of al-Qaeda's operations in Iraq, the pictures of beheading people, the Jihadi doctrines, etc. that are circulated in the internet, might be more than enough for that matter to be rooted in the Islamists' or others soul, who would very much like to emulate al-Qaeda's methods against their enemies. Thus, al-Qaeda in Sudan may be regarded as a success story that enjoins Sudan to other countries in the Horn of Africa, such as Somalia, where al-Qaeda's methods begin to be enrooted.

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Somalia Following the Defeat of the Union of Islamic Courts – Al-Qaeda's Next Front?
By Moshe Terdman

Introduction
On January 12, 2007, the Ethiopian army backed Transitional Federal Government (TFG) forces in capturing Ras Kamboni, the last remaining stronghold of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) in southern Somalia, after five days of heavy fighting. Thus, it completed the defeat of the ICU, which as from June 5, 2006, when it took control of Mogadishu, until recently, controlled most of Somalia and the vast majority of its population, including most major cities such as Jowar, Kismayo, Beledweyne, and Mogadishu. Only the arid Northern regions (Puntland, Somaliland), and the furthest interior regions of the south were outside their control.28

The ICU seemed unstoppable in their quest to unite the country under strict Islamic laws and to destroy its rival, Somalia's internationally-recognized but weak secular interim government, the TFG, headquartered in the town of Baidoa. The Islamists said that their aim was to restore law and order in Somalia. However, Ethiopia and the United States accused some senior Islamist leaders of seeking to form an East African cell of al-Qaeda and of creating regional instability by accepting military support from Eritrea - Ethiopia's main rival in the Horn of Africa.29

Thus, the recent war in Somalia was in essence an armed conflict, in which the Ethiopian and the TFG forces fought against the ICU and affiliated militias over the control of the country. The war officially began on December 21, 2006, when the ICU’s leader, Hasan Dahir Aweys, declared Somalia in a state of war and called all the Somalis to take part in the Jihad against Ethiopia. Three days after that, Ethiopia stated that it would actively fight against the ICU. The ICU was engaged in fighting against the forces of the Somali TFG, and the autonomous

regional governments of Puntland and Somaliland, all of them were backed by Ethiopian troops. The outbreak of heavy fighting began already in December 20, with the Battle of Baidoa, after a lapse of a one-week deadline the ICU imposed on Ethiopia to withdraw from Somalia. Ethiopia, however, refused to withdraw from its positions around the TFG interim capital in Baidoa, and thus, to leave the TFG to the mercy of the ICU. On December 29, after several successful battles, TFG and Ethiopian troops entered Mogadishu following its evacuation by the TFG one day earlier. Later, on December 31, 2006, Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, chairman of the ICU, along with other ICU officials in the port city of Kismayo, urged Islamist supporters across Somalia to wage guerilla war against the Ethiopian troops backing the TFG. In effect, it was an admission in defeat.30

Following the victory of the Ethiopian-backed TFG forces over the ICU, chaos returned to rule Somalia, as all attempts to disarm the various Somali clans failed and were met with resistance. This situation forced Somalia's acting parliament to approve on January 13, 2007 imposing three months of martial law all over Somalia as part of the TFG's efforts to assert authority over Somalia.31

Thus, the main question to be asked is what will be next. Will the ICU keep on fighting? Is there a possibility for peace between the TFG and the ICU? Is the situation in Somalia going to slide again into chaos that will threaten all the Horn of Africa? Can this scenario be averted? In order to answer these questions, one must, first of all, examine who are the Islamists comprising the ICU.

The Rule of the Islamic Court Union in Somalia

The ICU is a union of Shari'ah law courts, which were formed out of the chaos of the 1990s to administer justice in the district of Mogadishu, in which they were established. Thus, this system of Shari'ah based Islamic Courts became the main judicial system. It was funded then through fees paid by litigants. Over time the courts began to offer other services, such as education and health care. The courts also acted as local police forces, being paid by local businesses to reduce crime. The Islamic courts were responsible for halting robberies and drug-dealing, as well as for stopping the showing of what it claims to be pornographic films in local movie houses. By the mid-1990s they had progressed to dealing with major crimes in north Mogadishu. They amputated the limbs of the thieves and executed murderers. Since then, the Islamic courts also validated transactions such as the purchase of houses and cars. They also oversaw weddings and divorces and gradually, expanded their authority across most of Mogadishu, while staying out of politics.32

In 1999, supporters of the Islamic courts and other institutions formed an armed militia. A year later, the courts formed a union of Islamic courts, partly to consolidate resources and power and partly to aid in passing decisions across clan lines. In this regard it should be

noted that the Islamic Courts always said that they wanted to promote Islamic law rather than clan allegiance. In order to avoid accusations of clan bias, each court tried members of its own sub-clan -- since almost all of them were associated with just one clan, the Hawiye, who dominates the capital – wherever the alleged crime was committed.\footnote{See on-line in: \url{http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/5051588.stm}}

As they asserted themselves as the dispensers of justice, the courts came into conflict with the secular warlords who controlled most of Mogadishu. In reaction to the ever-growing power of the ICU, a group of Mogadishu warlords formed the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism (ARPCT) in February 2006. In May 2006, the clashes between the two groups escalated into street fighting in the capital. This fighting ended on June 5, 2006, when the ICU claimed that they were in control of Mogadishu.\footnote{See on-line in: \url{http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_Courts_Union}; \url{http://jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2370028}; \url{http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/5051588.stm}}

The ICU consists of three groups, each with its own goal and objective. Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed heads the moderate group. In general, it has only one goal, to bring back security, and unite the country. He is 32 years old, a law graduate from Libya and former secondary school geography teacher. Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys heads the Jihadi-Salafi element. Sheikh Aweys is on the American list of terrorist suspects since he used to head the radical Somali organization al-Ittihad al-Islami, which was linked to al-Qaeda. This group wants to establish a Taliban-like regime in Somalia, in which any Somali who does not share their understanding of Islam will be declared an apostate and executed. The third group consists of the remnants of the Greater Somalia advocates. The Greater Somalia is comprised of Somalia and Somali-inhabited regions in Ethiopia and Kenya.\footnote{See on-line in: \url{http://www.americanchronicle.com/articles/viewArticle.asp?articleID=18061}; \url{http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/5051588.stm}; \url{http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_Courts_Union}}

Each member of the ICU was a Shari'ah judge in charge of a specified court in a particular district of Somalia, and it was up to him to determine how Shari'ah law was enforced. These interpretations could either be very literal or very broad, and correspondingly had led to varying levels of liberty and repression. In order to organize the courts into a more coherent organization, a "Supreme Islamic Court of Banadir" was created on October 5, 2006, with the most senior judges forming this high court. This court dealt with wide issues, as well as foreign relations, and commanded the ICU military forces as a whole. The chairman of the Supreme Islamic Court was Sharif Sheikh Ahmed. A consultative Shura Council chaired by Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys approved the decisions made by the Supreme Islamic Court, and had therefore been called the "real power" in the ICU. This is not entirely true, however, since the Shura could not act unilaterally either. Below the Supreme Council and Shura Council were the regional courts spread throughout Somalia, which governed over the day to day issues of justice and law. These courts had enormous independence, and so the laws and regulations in ICU territory could vary widely from town to town, based on the particular moderation or radicalism of the specific court.\footnote{See on-line in: \url{http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/5051588.stm}}

Another body affiliated with the ICU was Hizb al-Shabab, also known as al-Shabab, which was the youth wing of the ICU. It was a radical and independent organization under the ICU
umbrella. It was integrated quite tightly with the ICU armed forces, acting as a sort of "special forces" for the ICU. The Shabab used to abduct journalists, harassing overly-hip youngsters, and even murdering wounded Juba Valley Alliance soldiers in a Bu'aale hospital. Their actions aided the global perception of the ICU being like the Taliban. The Shabab was headed by Adan Hashi Ayro, who is an Afghanistan-trained militia commander, whose militiamen had been implicated in numerous killings of Somalis, as well as five foreign aid workers and a BBC producer, Kate Peyton.37

How can one explain the ICU's astonishing success, even more so, given the fact it was not a compact, centralized organization, but an umbrella group of local bodies divided among moderate Islamists and radical ones? The attempts of analysts to explain the ICU's success have focused on the weariness of Somalia's population with chronic conflict and its weakening effects, and on disaffection with the warlords who were responsible for the distress. Yet, the fact that the ICU could not have gained power if he did not pose a more attractive alternative to the warlords is not sufficient in itself to explain the rapidity and conclusiveness of its ascent.

The ICU's ability to move so effectively with singleness of purpose is traceable to the eruption of Somali nationalism throughout the first half of 2006. Thus, the immediate cause for the ICU's power surge was revelations in early 2006 that the ARPC had been receiving funds to arm itself from the US through the CIA working with the Ethiopian secret services. These revelations, and especially the implication of Somalia's traditional adversary Ethiopia in the affair, set off a nationalist reaction, which was exploited to the full by the ICU.38

Riding the nationalist reaction following its taking control of Mogadishu, the ICU had the possibility of really becoming a force that transcends clan loyalties. But, to achieve this aim, it had to overcome its internal divisions and moderate its Islamist program first. However, the division between moderates and radicals had already surfaced in debates within the ICU over whether to negotiate with the TFG on a national unity government or to form a separate government based on Islamic law.39

Another bone of contention between the two factions was the attitude towards foreign influences. The hardliners wanted to curb foreign influences, which in their view were regarded as immoral. They had closed down cinemas showing foreign films and football matches. Some radio stations had also been told not to play foreign music or local love songs and had been closed if they continued to do so, while other radio stations and cinemas, most probably under the supervision of moderate courts, had not been harmed.40

However, immediately after the taking of Mogadishu, it seemed like the moderates gained the upper hand. At that time, the ICU wanted to solidify their rule, while reassuring Western leaders that they did not intend to impose an extremist, Taliban-like government on Somalia.

In a coordinated effort including private conversations and public declarations, the ICU portrayed itself as a moderate force capable of stabilizing Somalia. A letter sent by militia leaders to foreign governments said they wanted "a friendly relationship with the international community".41

To further prove their point that the ICU's aim is to bring back security to chaotic Mogadishu and Somalia, the ICU announced on July 3, 2006, new guidelines on travel to Mogadishu, saying it wanted to boost traveler safety, following the killing of a Swedish cameraman, Martin Adler, on June 23, 2006, by an unidentified gunman as he covered a demonstration in Mogadishu. On July 15, 2006, it opened Mogadishu international airport, which had been closed for the last eleven years. On August 15, 2006, the ICU captured Haradhere, some 500km northeast of Mogadishu, which had become a safe haven for pirates, who had forced shipping firms and international organizations to pay large ransoms for the release of vessels and crews. Thus, it succeeded in fighting the pirates and taking one of their strongholds on Somalia. On August 25, 2006, the Islamic Courts reopened historical Mogadishu seaport, which was formerly one of the busiest in East Africa but had been shut down for ten years.42

All these steps could not hide the tension still existing between the moderates and extremists in the ICU, which seemed to grow more and more over time until the situation reversed and the ICU became more and more radicalized. Thus, radical Islamic courts shut cinema halls and barred residents from watching the World Cup Soccer games, prompting scores of civilians to protest the ban in which two people were killed on June 10, 2006.43 Furthermore, the ICU decreed in June 2006 that sport is a "satanic act". Thus, sport was banned during Ramadan. A group of teenagers playing soccer in Mogadishu was taken into custody in September 2006 and only released when their parents promised they would never allow their children to play football again. The Somali Olympic Committee (SOC) had established Islamic law in stadiums across Somalia with segregated seating for male and female sports fans. The SOC has also prepared mosques at all playing fields in the country so that the players will not miss the prayer.44

More repressive measures were enacted by the ICU against the Somali population. For example, Islamic Courts militias had beaten members of the Mogadishu Stars, a musical band, with "electric cables" after performing at a wedding ceremony, since the wedding included the mixing of men and women as well as playing music, which were regarded as un-Islamic.45

Moreover, The ICU enacted even more repressive measures against the media. A list of thirteen rules of conduct for the privately-owned media which the ICU gave to journalists in Mogadishu on October 8, 2006, had been condemned as completely unacceptable by

41 See on-line in: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/13/AR2006061301527.html
44 See on-line in: http://www.playthegame.org/News/Up%20To%20Date/Islamic_rulers_in_Somalia_label_sport_a_satanic_act.aspx
“Reporters without Borders.” Those included rules by which "the media must not publish or disseminate information contrary to the Muslim religion, the public interest, or the interest of the nation; the media must not disseminate information likely to create conflicts between the population and the Council of Islamic Courts; the media must not serve foreign interests; the media must not publish or disseminate elements of foreign culture contrary to Islamic culture or promoting bad behavior, such as nudity on film". 46

All these radical measures culminated on November 17, 2006, to banning the use, sale and transportation of the Gat (or khat), while the Islamic Court of Kismayo banned the sale of cigarettes. This was a controversial move as it was the main source of income for many war widows and orphans and a huge export-import business in the whole Horn of Africa region. 47 On December 2006, the ICU began to institute a "Jihad tax" in order to finance their war effort against the Ethiopians. The tax was being imposed on goat, cow and camel traders. The first area to pay the tax was the Karan district north of Mogadishu. 48 Another repressive measure was enacted on December 6, 2006, in Bulo Burto; a town located about 124 miles northeast of Mogadishu. The chairman of the Islamic Court there decided that as from that date a resident of the town who would not pray five times a day, as a good Muslim should, will be beheaded. This decision, however, was not binding on courts in other towns. Some of the courts had introduced public executions, flogging of convicts, bans on women swimming at Mogadishu's public beaches, etc. 49

This notion of radical Islam, which resembles the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, but which contrasts with the moderate Islam that has dominated Somali culture for centuries, led the Somalis to demonstrations against the regime. The ICU that in the beginning was regarded as bearing the banner of Somali nationalism was now regarded as preaching radical Islamism, alien to most Somali citizens, who belong to Sufi orders.

When the radical Islamist component gained the upper hand over the moderate Islamist element, it was all set for the appearance of al-Qaeda in Somalia and its exploitation of the ICU for opening a new theater of operations for Jihadi warfare, this time against the American-backed Ethiopians.

Al-Qaeda in Somalia: From a Source of Inspiration to a New Jihadi Theater of Operations

As a matter of fact, al-Qaeda was alleged to have a presence in Somalia even before the rise of the ICU to prominence in Somalia and the taking of Mogadishu by the US, Ethiopia, and in a later stage even by the TFG.

From the American and Ethiopian point of view, al-Qaeda did not appear out of the blue in Somalia. It was always there. The Islamists were perceived as linked directly to al-Qaeda, through people such as Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys and others. Thus, even before the taking of Mogadishu by the ICU, the US government was funding the ARPCT, due to concerns that

the ICU is linked to al-Qaeda and is sheltering three al-Qaeda leaders involved in the 1998 US Embassies bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. Later, following the taking of Mogadishu, the Ethiopian government decided to support the exiled warlords in order to oppose what in their view was a critical threat posed by the Islamic Courts to their administration of the Ogaden region. It was spurred primarily by the ICU's expansion and troop deployment up to the Ethiopian border. By mid June 2006, Ethiopia began vocally referring to the ICU as "al-Qaeda allies" and "terrorists".50

It should be mentioned, that boundary disputes over the Ogaden region date to the 1948 settlement, when it was granted to Ethiopia. Somali embitterment with this decision has led in 1977 to repeated attempts to invade Ethiopia with the hope of taking control of the Ogaden region as a first step towards creating a Greater Somalia. According to the vision of Greater Somalia, it should include Somalia, Ethiopian and Kenyan regions inhabited by Somalis.51 Indeed, the Ethiopians had a good reason to be afraid of the ICU’s designs concerning the Ogaden region. Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys spoke to Shabelle Radio about the formation of a Greater Somalia. He stated: "We will leave no stone unturned to integrate our Somali brothers in Kenya and Ethiopia and restore their freedom to live with their ancestors in Somalia".52 It was the first and only time that a statement on this issue was made by the ICU.

Regional concern heightened on November 2, 2006, when the US Embassy in Nairobi issued a terrorist warning of suicide attack threats in Kenya and Ethiopia, stemming from Somalia. Terrorist attack warning for Ethiopia and Kenya was reiterated on November 28, citing a letter purportedly written by Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, to attack US citizens in those countries.53

The TFG also adopted this American and Ethiopian perception of the Islamists as sheltering al-Qaeda members. Somali Prime Minister Gedi declared that one of the key objectives of the offensive on Kismayo was the capture of three alleged al-Qaeda members, suspects wanted for the 1998 US Embassies bombings: Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan and Abu Taha al-Sudani.54

From the beginning, then, the rise to power of the ICU in Somalia was regarded as another victory of al-Qaeda. The US, Ethiopia, and the TFG were determined to fight the ICU and al-Qaeda until victory will be achieved. The US regarded this war against the ICU as part of its global "war on terror" policy. Thus, a local conflict between the warlords and the TFG on the one side and the ICU on the other one evolved into a global conflict between the US and al-Qaeda.

Al-Qaeda was regarded amongst Islamists in Somalia, at least throughout the six-month period when the ICU ruled most of Somalia, as only a source of inspiration and emulation. On September 18, 2006, the Islamic Courts were alleged to make the first overt move against
the TFG. Just minutes after a speech to the Transitional Parliament, which was based out of the town of Baidoa, a suicide car bomber attacked the presidential convoy, in what was the first suicide strike in Somalia's history. Some reports indicate two car bombs were detonated. Six government officials were killed in the suicide strike, including President Yussuf's brother. President Yusuf blamed al-Qaeda for the attack. Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, on his part, blamed Ethiopia for the attack. On November 30, 2006, a second suicide bombing attack was conducted against the TFG. Nine were killed after a car suicide bomb detonated at a checkpoint outside of Baidoa. Hassan Dahir Aweys encouraged further suicide strikes.

Throughout the ICU’s rise to power and its expansion policy in Somalia, al-Qaeda confined itself to a passive and verbal support to the Islamists, while threatening the West not to interfere and portraying the conflict there as another battlefield against the "Crusaders". On July 1, 2006, just a short time following the taking of Mogadishu, a Web-posted massage written by Osama bin Laden urged Somalis to build an Islamic state in the country and back the ICU in its fight against the TFG. He further called on them to oppose the arrival of military forces in Somalia from any country, saying that such an arrival would be "a continuation of the Crusade against the Islamic World". Bin Laden warned Western states that his al-Qaeda network would fight against them if they intervened in Somalia.

Another manifestation of the perception of the conflict in Somalia as a global conflict can be seen in the interview that Ayman al-Zawahiri gave to the al-Sahab Media Production on September 11, 2006. In that interview, al-Zawahiri called on Somali Muslims to "use their strength to strike at America's underlings in Somalia", i.e., the TFG, urging them to expel the "Zionist-Crusader presence" from the Horn of Africa.

To put things in context, it should be mentioned that bin Laden has frequently cited the withdrawal of the US forces from Somalia in 1995, as a victory for the Mujahideen and an example of American "weakness, frailty, and cowardice", claiming that the US withdrawal was a result of the Mujahideen attacks. Thus, for example, in an interview he gave in October 2001 to al-Jazirah Television, bin Laden said that "We experienced the Americans through our brothers who went into combat against them in Somalia, for example… America exited dragging its tails in failure, defeat, and ruin, caring for nothing". Moreover, Somalia was featured in books of radical Islamist scholars as an example for a place in which to establish camps for the Mujahideen. Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, al-Qaeda's strategist, in his book circulated on the Jihadi forums in 2004, encouraged the Mujahideen to exploit "chaotic regions" such as Somalia to establish camps where they could train on an "open front".

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57 See on-line in: [http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=6089b6a264c8367c8dd58a8cc4aa30f2&threadid=43097](http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=6089b6a264c8367c8dd58a8cc4aa30f2&threadid=43097)
58 See on-line in: [http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=46618d9a0f4f632918d20b18dec68ae7&threadid=45348](http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=46618d9a0f4f632918d20b18dec68ae7&threadid=45348)
But with the outbreak of the war with the Ethiopians-backed TFG, officials of the ICU called on Muslim fighters from all over the world to come to Somalia and help them to fight against Ethiopian troops in the country on December 23, 2006. Sheikh Yusuf Mohammed Siad Inda'ade, the ICU's defense chief, said that "The country is open to all Muslim Jihadis worldwide. We call them to come to Somalia and continue their holy war in Somalia. We welcome any one, who can remove the Ethiopian enemy, to enter our country". He further said: "Let them [Muslim Jihadis] fight in Somalia and wage Jihad, and god willing, attack Addis Ababa".61

A short time after the ICU invited Muslim volunteers from all over the world to fight against the Ethiopian-backed TFG, a call for the Mujahideen to come to Somalia and fight the Ethiopians was circulated in the Jihadi forums on December 26, 2006.62 A day later, the flight schedules of planes from Jeddah, Dubai, Djibouti, and Nairobi to Somalia were circulated in the Jihadi forums under the title "Support Our People in Somalia… Flight Schedules to Mogadishu".63 Furthermore, on the same day, the Iraqi Islamic nation published in the Jihadi forums a call to all the Muslims "to stand by their brothers in Somalia and to aid them with money, ammunition and men".64

This invitation demonstrated the global nature of the conflict in Somalia. The rest of the story is well known. Ethiopia defeated the Islamists, who vowed to continue fighting, within ten days and nowadays, when all the major ICU's bases are controlled by the Ethiopian-backed TFG, the rest of the Islamists are still on the run, trying to find refuge among the civilian population, or trying to flee to Kenya or Yemen. What is less known, however, is what the approach of al-Qaeda was? Was its approach passive, as occurred in Sudan, or active? And, what were the responses of the Mujahideen to the ICU's defeat by the Ethiopia-backed TFG?

Following the ICU's defeat, Ayman al-Zawahiri urged the Islamists in Somalia not to give in, but to continue fighting. On January 5, 2007, Ayman al-Zawahiri issued a videotape, which was circulated in the Jihadi forums, titled "Help your brothers in Somalia!". He told the Islamists in Somalia that "the true battle will begin with your attacks against the Ethiopian forces". He advised them "to resort to mines, ambushes, incursions and martyrdom attacks. By employing these methods, you will overwhelm their forces, erode their morals and eventually defeat them like a prey consumed alive by a lion". He again called on the Mujahideen "to respond the call of Jihad in Somalia". Indeed, he turned to all the Mujahideen, but he also made a special plea to those from Yemen, the Arabian Peninsula,
Egypt, Sudan, and the Maghreb, i.e., all the countries close to Somalia, to "rush aid to their Muslim brothers in Somalia by means of fighters, money, opinion and expertise".65

This videotape and the repeated calls for the Mujahideen to flock into Somalia issued in the Jihadi forums while the war was still raging there may teach us that the attitude of the Mujahideen toward the pleas for help from the ICU as well as from Ayman al-Zawahiri was passive as it was in Sudan. It seems that only a few Mujahideen, if any at all, really came to Somalia.

This passive attitude was expressed by moral support and many advices how to act from now on for the Islamists in Somalia posted in Jihadi forums. Already on December 27, 2008, “Nuri al-Muradi” from Iraq published an article titled "To the Great Somali People", in which he called the Islamists in Somalia to wage Jihad against its enemies and to conduct suicide attacks against them.66 Later, on January 5, 2007, “Abu Torab al-Jazairi” wrote an article titled "Now Somali Mujahideen", in which he advised them to "manufacture rockets and explosives" to be used against the Ethiopians and to "take control of the strategic rear bases". He further advised them to "let them [the Ethiopian-backed TFG] to spread in the difficult areas in which they will not be able to use the vehicles and [thus will have to] use only the infantry… and in due course, if you split their forces into five or six areas, it will be easier for you to defeat them". He also urged the Islamists in Somalia to "open openings and passes with the neighboring countries, especially with the Muslim tribes living there… so that the Mujahideen will not remain excluded from the outside world".67

Moreover, analysis of what is going to occur following the defeat of the ICU was published and circulated in Jihadi forums. According to most of the articles, the ICU's defeat is regarded as only a temporal one and the war is perceived to be only at its first stage. Indeed, according to these articles, this war will be a long one. The ICU was defeated militarily, but it was not defeated ideologically or politically, so that it can rise again from the ashes of its defeat from among the population and defeat the TFG and the Ethiopian later. The Ethiopian victory over the Islamists in Somalia is compared to the American victory in Iraq. Both were fast victories. A long struggle against the Americans has been conducted in the aftermath of the American victory in Iraq. This will be the situation in Somalia too in the aftermath of the Ethiopian victory, according to most authors. This struggle will be conducted as a guerilla war that will include tactics used by the Mujahideen in Iraq, such as surprise attacks, suicide attacks, assassinations, snipers' shots, explosives, etc.68

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65 See on-line in: http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=e5cc4396b9b4fd7bc5a74bff3e4286c2&threadid=48006
66 See on-line in: http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=e5cc4396b9b4fd7bc5a74bff3e4286c2&threadid=47899
67 See on-line in: http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=e5cc4396b9b4fd7bc5a74bff3e4286c2&threadid=48014
68 See on-line in: http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=e5cc4396b9b4fd7bc5a74bff3e4286c2&threadid=48144;
These articles also analyze the advantages of the tactic of withdrawal from the big cities. One such article titled "The ICU's Withdrawal: Its Reasons, Advantages, and Implications", was posted in Jihadi forums on January 3, 2007. According to the article, the ICU withdrew from the cities which were under its jurisdiction in order to be less exposed to the Ethiopian air force assaults; to reduce casualties among the civilian population; and to organize the forces far away from the Ethiopians or the TFG forces. Then, the article goes on to describe the advantages of this withdrawal. First of all, the people will be able to equate between the Islamic regime and the TFG's regime and to see which of these regimes will be able to establish security and order. Furthermore, this withdrawal will cause the Ethiopians to be absorbed in the Somali quagmire, which will harm its economy and army and which will weaken its control over its Muslims. This, in turn, will make it easier to beat Ethiopia after the spread of its army in Somalia.69

However, there were also some authors who criticized the ICU and its adversaries' fast victory over them. An article titled "the ICU's defeat in Somalia – and no need in arrogance", published and circulated in the Jihadi forums on December 28, 2006, the day in which the ICU evacuated Mogadishu, criticized harshly the ICU. This article is opened in a very criticizing tone and tells the readers that "We have to learn from our mistakes". Then, it proceeds to describe what those mistakes are. The first mistake, according to this article, is "the announcement on what we do not have and the enthusiastic way in which the Jihadi leaders talk without any justification and the speed in which [these leaders] make dangerous decisions". That is why the author claims he saw the ICU's defeat from the first minutes, "when he saw Sheikh Sharif saying that he would beat the enemies in their capital". According to the author, this is "a very dangerous announcement that should not be announced unless the ICU has the ability to cause real damage to the enemy's capital… but the talking on what we do not have in effect is a matter of intentions' revealing for the enemy, and this early exposure prevents us the opportunity to maneuver, while giving the enemy the sufficient justification to punish us". The second mistake was the tactical withdrawal from Mogadishu, which, from the author's point of view was "an escape from fighting the enemy". The author claims that "the withdrawal from the capital without a fight is not allowed unless the brothers in Somalia wish to follow the Afghani trial with the knowledge that the Afghani trial cannot be regarded as a successful trial for the Mujahideen up until now, since the Mujahideen are still fighting today in order to return to the point where they were before the American invasion". Then, he says that the ICU should have implemented the Iraqi Jihadi model instead.70

Another subject of criticism in the Jihadi forums is the silence of the Arab countries in the face of the Islamist's plight in Somalia. In an article titled "Somalia (Muslim people without a
Supporter and a Traitor Government without a Conscience) 

Despite all the advices, moral support, pleas for the Mujahideen worldwide to come to Somalia and take an active part in the Jihad against the Ethiopians and the TFG, it seems that until now no aid has been sent to the Islamists in Somalia. It seems like al-Qaeda has failed to attract the Arab and Muslim Mujahideen to Somalia. This failure may stem from the remoteness of Somalia from the main Jihadi theaters -- Afghanistan and Iraq -- and from the preference of the Mujahideen to go to participate actively in these Jihadi theaters instead of going to Somalia.

This might also be the explanation for the appearance of an article titled "Come al-Hisbah Family and Study the Horn of Africa where Allah Takes Part in Jihad". This article, which was circulated in the Jihadi forums on January 13, 2007, describes the importance of the Horn of Africa for the Mujahideen. According to the article, the Horn of Africa is located in a very strategic location since all the ships, among them a huge number of oil tankers, sailing through the Suez Canal must sail along the Horn of Africa's shores and through the Bab al-Mandab Straits. Thus, this region is important for world security and the presence of pirates in this region may cost the world billions of dollars, shake the world energy market and raise dramatically the cost of the oil. Furthermore, this region is located very close to Yemen and Saudi Arabia and has shores stretching from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean, which makes the global trade and the contraband activity very easy in this region and which makes the siege from the sea almost impossible. As for the interior, it is mostly desert or mountainous near the shores, while there are dense forests in southern Somalia. All this makes the Horn of Africa, and especially Somalia, a perfect secured shelter for the Mujahideen in Yemen and the Arabian Peninsula as well as one of the most important regions for waging attacks on oil tankers and military ships, such as the attacks waged against the French oil tanker and the American destroyer USS Cole. Moreover, the region might be one of the most important funding sources for the Mujahideen, who can attack the ships of their enemies and take its cargo as spoils. Socially, the society in the Horn of Africa is tribal in essence and the loyalty to the tribe is far more superior than the loyalty to the state. Therefore, there are many wars in this part of the world. The only chance to unite these tribes is through the religion of Islam. The Muslims are all Sunni and it is very important for the Mujahideen, who are Sunni too.

So, with al-Qaeda out of the game for the time being, the Islamic Courts are conducting their own information and influence campaign. Qaadisiya -- www.qaadisiya.com -- a Somali language website run by the Islamic Courts, has begun posting statements in support of an insurgency. On January 3, Qaadisiya announced the creation of the National Resistance Front for the Liberation of Somalia, and reported that leaflets were distributed that announced the "formation of the new front, as well as contained many other points, among which were that bomb attacks would soon be started in the country and warning people to stay away from Tigrean troops [Ethiopians], and that, no matter who they were, people who worked with infidel Tigreans would suffer the same fate as them". On January 2, 2007, Qaadisiya reposted a statement released last November that announced the creation of "The Mujahidin of the Land of the Two Hegiras (Ethiopia)", which, "aligned themselves with Bin Laden and al-
 Qaeda Organization and agreed to fight for the Jihad until Islamic law is enforced throughout the Land of the Two Hegiras”. About 75 Muslims are said to have joined the Jihadi group.73

With this in mind, the question to be asked is what will be next? Will the TFG be able to assert its authority in Mogadishu to begin with? What will be of the Ethiopian forces? Will and when, if at all, the ICU begin their actions against the Ethiopians and the TFG forces?

What Next?
Following the ICU's defeat, there is, at last, a centrally-established government in control of the Somali capital for the first time since 1978, symbolized by President Abdullah Yusuf's first visit to Mogadishu. Still, whether the TFG will succeed to stay in control and extend its authority throughout Somalia depends on four elements.

The first element is its ability to control the warlords who previously looted the population and who comprise one part of the TFG, together with another part comprising of self appointed Somali leaders in exile without any social or political base in the country. This composition of the TFG is not likely to appeal to the majority of the Somalis. Thus, whereas the ICU sprang from within the Somali people and was accepted by them -- since it was the only body that could impose law and order in the chaotic period, when warlords used to fight each other – the warlords do not enjoy this same recognition from the Somalis. The TFG is regarded as a government that does not represent the Somalis. Worse still, it is perceived as a government established in exile to represent alien interests.

The second element is its ability to disarm the warlords as well as the whole population. There are many arms spread all over Somalia and many more continue to pour in for the needs of the warlords, the population and the Islamists. Indeed, the ICU succeeded to disarm the warlords and the population, which was a great achievement. This was made possible through their legitimacy to rule and their reputation as the only ones who could impose law and order. The TFG do not enjoy these legitimacy and reputation. Furthermore, for the Hawiye clan, who comprises most of Mogadishu inhabitants, to give away its arms to the TFG, while the TFG forces mostly comprise of Darood clan fighters, especially of Majerteen (President Abdullah's sub-clan), is out of the question. However, the TFG won a partial victory in this issue, when four important warlords in Mogadishu conveyed their arms to government officials. But, still, the TFG has a long way until the disarmament will be completed.

The third element is how the TFG intends to deal with the defeated Islamists – if not the leaders, at least the rank and file. Some of the ICU’s moderate leaders, amongst them the ICU's foreign affairs chief, Ibrahim Adow, who succeeded to slip past both Ethiopian troops and US warships and found refuge in Yemen, announced that they were committed to the peace talks. But, to no avail. The Somali government, under external pressure, has promised an amnesty to all the ICU's ran and file, in condition they will disarm, while its leaders will continue to face persecution and will not be negotiated with. Thus, the TFG has not given in to an international pressure to let the moderate Islamists, like Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, to play positive roles in the government.

The forth element is the short and medium-term actions of the TFG and the response of the international community, especially Somalia's neighbors. For example, despite the bombing of one of its border posts at Har Har, the Kenyan government has so far cooperated with the TFG, despite its rivalry with Addis Ababa, as it did with the ICU before. It sealed its border to fleeing Islamic Courts fighters and arrested eleven of its leaders fleeing across the border.

All those elements depend on another key and crucial element, which is the withdrawal of the Ethiopian forces from Somalia. The Ethiopian intervention in Somalia marks just another phase in a long line of outside interference in Somalia, internationally and regionally. The presence of the Ethiopians in Somalia is awakening the Somali nationalism. The Somalis are seeking revenge for what they see as a Western/Christian plot to keep a weak and divided Somalia permanently under their control. Thus, the attacks on joint Ethiopian-Somali armed forces have begun in Mogadishu. It is expected that these hit and run tactics will continue as long as Ethiopian forces are in Mogadishu. But, these attacks took a more dangerous turn, at least for the TFG, when on January 19, 2007; the Somali President's palace itself was a focus for an attack. The attackers fired three mortars into the presidential compound and then engaged guards in a 30-minute fight. No one was injured or killed, but this attack marks the illegitimacy of the TFG, at least as long as the Ethiopians stay in Somalia.

Meles Zenawi, Ethiopian Prime Minister, has said several times that he intends to withdraw his forces from Somalia within weeks, since the cost has been huge and beyond Ethiopia's means. Moreover, the intervention had had heavy political costs at home as well as abroad. Given that Ethiopia is almost equally divided along Christian and Muslim lines, the Ethiopian government faces multiple internal challenges from the civil society, and especially within the Ogaden region. The ONLF (Ogaden National Liberation Front) attacked an Ethiopian convoy of armed forces in Region Five of Ethiopia and the Ethiopian government responded by killing and burning villages in that region. On the international front, the Arab League, the African Union, the European Union and the UN Secretary General have all called for the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces from Somalia.

Given the soon expected Ethiopian withdrawal, the TFG has invited African peacekeepers to help provide security in Somalia, but they are unlikely to come if fighting continues. African Union officials approved an 8,000-peacekeeper mission on January 19, 2007, but African nations have yet to send that many troops. Thus, there is a justified fear among analysts that remnants and supporters of the Islamists in Somalia will exploit the opportunity when a vacuum of power emerges after the withdrawal of the Ethiopians and before the arrival of the expected African peacekeeping mission in Somalia to crush the TFG and rule the country.

Thus, the situation in Somalia is unpredictable and precarious. The potential for violence remains high because of clan rivalries, resentment of the government's Ethiopian backers, a threat of guerilla war from remnants of the ICU, hiding among the civilian population, and a relapse into the previous warlord-controlled anarchy. In these consequences, while the Ethiopians are still present in Somalia and the Ethiopian-backed TFG will not have anything to do with the ICU's moderate leaders, the moderates within the ICU, even those who still wish to negotiate with the TFG, will be radicalized too. This radicalization process, which might happen very fast, is the real threat for Somalia. If it can be prevented, than a national
reconciliation can prevail and, as a consequence, also law and order can be established. But, if not, than the destiny of Somalia might be relapsing into chaos again.

In order to help in creating this reconciliation process among the Somalis, in which end everyone—warlords, TFG, Islamists—will have a share in the government, Yemen might play a most important role. Yemen is located just across the Gulf of Aden from Somalia. More importantly, Yemen is an Arab country, a member in the Arab League, which has strategic interests in the Horn of Africa. It established a regional alliance, together with Ethiopia and Sudan against Eritrea in order to prevent its expansionist drive. Thus, Yemen was accused of arming the TFG. Despite this accusation, Yemen is accepted also by the moderate Islamists as a mediator. On December 2006, Yemen hosted talks between Sheikh Sharif Ahmed and Somali parliament speaker, Sharif Hassan Sheikh Adan, which had come to nothing. But Yemen continues to act as a peace-broker between all the parties to the conflict.

Yemen has much more chances to succeed in creating this reconciliation process since it is an Arab country. The Somalis, despite their black skin, perceive themselves as Arabs and not as Africans. Somalia is a member in the Arab League and will prefer that another member in the Arab League will mediate between the warring sides, whether it is Sudan or Yemen. This might be also the cause for the ICU's refusal for the deployment of African Union peacekeepers in Somalia.

Finally, there were several indications that the ICU was and still is very popular, especially among expatriate Somalis in the US. On December 29, 2006, 1,500 Somalis gathered in Minneapolis' Peavey Park for a demonstration in favor of the ICU and against American support for the Ethiopian and Somali forces that toppled it. This demonstration was organized by the Somali Institute for Peace and Justice. Some demonstrators carried the traditional signs of the Muslim Brotherhood that read "Islam is the solution". Abdul Mohamed, a member of the Somali Institute for peace and justice, denounced American policy toward Somalia as motivated by "Islamophobia". Thus, the reconciliation process in Somalia might also influence Somali expatriates abroad to moderate their Islamic extremism.

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The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND): Al-Qaeda's Unlikely Ally in Nigeria
By Moshe Terdman

Introduction
On January 16, 2007, the Nigerian Federal High Court charged Mallam Bello Ilyas Damagun, the director of Media Trust Ltd – publishers of Daily Trust Newspaper -- with terrorism. He is alleged to have links with al-Qaeda and to have sent young Nigerian militants abroad to attend training camps. The High Court further claims that he was part of a

74 See on-line in: http://www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/ReadArticle.asp?ID=26233
group called "the Nigerian Taliban" and had taken money to fund terrorism from al-Qaeda in Sudan. The suspect pleaded not guilty to a three-count charge and was released on bail.\footnote{See on-line in: \url{http://allafrica.com/stories/200701171418.html}; \url{http://allafrica.com/stories/200701170559.html}; \url{http://allafrica.com/stories/200701171045.html}}

The prosecution charged him under the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission Act 2004, that in 2002 Mallam Damagun collected $300,000 from al-Qaeda to use and recruit members and execute "acts of terrorism". The money was given to him by al-Qaeda in Sudan and was kept in a London bank account. The bank was named as Habibsons Bank Limited, Windsor House, 55-56 St. James Street, London in Account Number, 2106795. Moreover, Mallam Damagun was accused of sending fourteen young men to an alleged terrorist training camp in Mauritania. The court named three of the young men as Nura Umar, Abdul Aziz Hamza and Muhammed Ibrahim. They were sent to the Ummul Qorah Islamic camp in Mauritania. He was also accused of giving a ten-seater bus and a public address system to Muhammed Yusuf -- a suspected operative of the Nigeria Taliban -- in Maiduguri, the base of the Nigerian Taliban. According to the charge sheet, the bus was used to "spread extremism" and thereby was an act of terrorism.\footnote{See on-line in: \url{http://allafrica.com/stories/200701171418.html}; \url{http://allafrica.com/stories/200701170559.html}; \url{http://allafrica.com/stories/200701171045.html}}

The Taliban, otherwise known as the Hijrah movement, is composed of young graduates and post graduates, most of them are from highly placed and influential families. Its aim is to establish an Islamic country, based on the Shari'ah, in north east Nigeria, on the border with Niger. They regard the society as so morally and politically corrupt, that the best thing for a devout Muslim to do was to migrate out of the sins and corruption to a place or society where they can establish their model Islamic society. Thus, approximately at the middle of 2003, the Nigerian Taliban's members "migrated" out of Maiduguri to the bush area around Kanamma in Yunusari local government area of Yobe State. While in the Kanamma bush area, the Hijrah group members, along with their wives and children, established "a base" (\textit{Qaeda} in Arabic), where they engaged in religious studies.\footnote{See on-line in: \url{http://www.biafraland.com/Taliban-Nigeria.htm}}

At the end of December 2003, the group attacked suddenly the police station in Kanamma town. In this assault one policeman was killed. In addition, the Hijrah members took loads of arms and ammunitions after setting the police station and other public places on fire. From Kanamma, the group went to Geidam, headquarters of Geidam local government area, where they also overran the police station, chased out the policemen and took away guns and other weapons. Then, the Hijrah group attacked several police-stations in Damaturu – the Yobe state capital – in which one policeman officer was killed, in Dapchi and Babbangida.\footnote{See on-line in: \url{http://www.biafraland.com/Taliban-Nigeria.htm}}

Following its attacks on the police-stations, the Hijrah group members distributed leaflets stating their principal goals, which are: establish an Islamic state in the areas around Kanamma, Yunusari and Toshiya; place these areas under the leadership of Mullah Umar, presumably the fugitive former leader of the Taliban movement in Afghanistan; kill any "unbeliever in uniform" – presumably policemen and soldiers -- and call Muslims in Nigeria...
to rise up in Jihad to defend Islam and spread its realm. However, the Nigerian security forces crushed this group, which still exists nowadays.79

Despite the charges brought against Mallam Damagun, which might have sparked again fears of the Nigerian Taliban, the Nigerian federal government has another threat on hand from which it fears much more. This threat is posed nowadays by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta. This organization is making use of al-Qaeda tactic methods in order to achieve its aims. It is the only Christian ally of al-Qaeda in Nigeria, or even in the whole of the African continent.

The Nigerian Oil Crisis
On February 18, 2006, MEND's military leader, Major-General Godswill Tamuno, declared a total war on all foreign oil companies and their employees. It was the opening shot for a wave of kidnappings that has been haunting, with some short intervals, the Niger Delta until today.80

MEND is a militant indigenous people's movement dedicated to armed struggle against what they claim to be the exploitation and oppression of the people of Niger Delta and the degradation of their natural environment by foreign multi national corporations involved in the extraction of oil in their homeland. Thus, its stated goals are to localize control of Nigeria's oil and to securing reparations from the national government for pollution caused by the oil industry.81

In addition, MEND has called President Olusegun Obasanjo to free two jailed Ijaw leaders – Mujahid Dokubo-Asari, who is jailed and charged with treason, and Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, a former governor of Bayelsa State charged with corruption.82

Alhaji Mujahid Dokubo-Asari was born in 1964 as Dokubo Melford Goodhead Jr. into a middle class Christian family. He is a major political figure of the Ijaw ethnic group in the Niger Delta. The Ijaw is the largest ethnic group in the Delta region with a population of over seven million. Asari was one of the founders of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) in December 1988, and was appointed as vice-president of the organization. This organization issued the Kaiama Declaration, in which it called the oil companies to suspend operations and withdraw from Ijaw territory. The IYC pledged "to struggle peacefully for freedom, self determination and ecological injustice". He was also a president of the IYC for some time beginning in 2001 and later founded the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), which is one of the most prominent armed groups operating in the Niger Delta region.83

MEND is closely connected with Asari's Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force, a rebel group with similar aims. In response to the launch of a failed mission to wipe out the NDPVF in

See on-line in: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4732210.stm
See on-line in: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4732210.stm
See on-line in: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4732210.stm
September 2005, Asari declared "all-out war" with the Nigerian state as well as with the oil corporations and threatened to disrupt oil production activities through attacks on wells and pipelines. This caused a major oil crisis with Shell evacuating some of its employees and cutting oil production by 30,000 barrels a day and pushing up the price of petroleum worldwide significantly. As a result, President Obasanjo called Asari and the leader of its rival military group, the Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), Akeke Tom, to Abuja for peace talks. But when these failed, Asari was arrested in September 2005 and charged with treason by the Nigerian federal government.84

In the background for this oil crisis, one has to understand that Nigeria is Africa's leading oil exporter and the fifth biggest source of US oil imports, which accounts for 9% of US exports. Oil has been produced in Nigeria ever since its independence from British rule. By the early 1990s Nigeria became almost completely dependent on petroleum extraction economically, generating 25% of its GDP (this has since risen to 40% as of 2000). Nigeria produces over two million barrels of oil a day, which accounts for 90% of its export earnings and 80% of government revenue. Over the years, the Nigerian government has signed laws that appropriated oil resources and placed them under the control of the multinational oil companies, such as Chevron Corporation, and most notably, Shell. Despite the vast wealth created by petroleum, the benefits failed to reach to the majority of the population, who as from the 1960s has been dispossessed from their farms in favor of foreign oil interests and thus, has increasingly abandoned their traditional agricultural practices. So, in spite of the ever-growing number of skilled, well-paid Nigerians who have been employed by the oil corporations, the majority of Nigerians, and especially the people of the Niger Delta states has become poorer since the 1960s.85

Furthermore, the Delta region has a steadily growing population estimated to be over 30 million people as of 2005, accounting for more than 23% of Nigeria's total population, and this number is always rising from year to year. The population is also among the highest of the world with 265 people per kilometer-squared. This population is extending at a rapid 3% per year and the oil capital, Port Harcourt, along with other large towns are growing quickly. Thus, it is not surprising to find that poverty and urbanization in Nigeria are on the rise. This has ironically forced the growing populace to begin destroying the ecosystem that they require to sustain themselves.86

However, from the point of view of MEND and its supporters, the people of the Niger Delta have suffered an unprecedented degradation of their environment due to unchecked pollution produced by the oil industry and not due to natural socio-economical processes. As a result, over the last twenty years various political movements and activists have emerged in opposition to the injustices perpetrated upon the people of the Niger Delta by the government and the oil companies. At first, these were characterized in non-violence. But, from the end

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of the 1990s, these movements and activists adopted a more violent response as a means to resist what they considered to be the enslavement of their people. Ethnic and political unrest has continued throughout the 2000s and even escalated at the end of 2006 and the beginning of 2007.87

2006 has been a violent year across the Niger Delta. Militants had killed 37 Nigerian soldiers in attacks; seized, and later released more than 70 hostages in almost weekly incidents; blown up a pipeline to an export terminal; and detonated a car bomb near tanker trucks.88 It seems like this trend continues into the year 2007. A hostage taking is the favorite tactic of MEND in its fight against the foreign oil corporations and their employees. The aim of this method is twofold: creating maximum panic in the international oil markets as well as bringing the giant US and European financial companies, that have invested heavily in the Gulf of Guinea's oil and gas industry, to exert pressure on the Nigerian government to respond to their demands.89

During the time, the tactics implemented by MEND became more and more sophisticated. A car bomb activated by a cell phone exploded at the beginning of May 2006 at an oil-truck stop near Wari, one of the central major towns in the Niger Delta. A MEND official wrote an email to news organizations following this attack, in which he stated that "the bomb was the final warning before fresh attacks on oil workers, storage facilities, bridges, offices, and other soft, oil industry targets". But, it was also "a massage to the Chinese governments and its oil companies to steer well clear of the Niger Delta. The Chinese government by investing in stolen crude places its citizens in our line of fire".90

These tactics brought the Chevron and Shell officials to change their attitude towards handling these attacks. All through the 1990s and even later, Chevron and Shell officials had backed military attacks on local communities, insisting that their business interests obliged them to offer logistical and financial support to Nigerian troops in their effort to protect the Delta oil fields. However, when attacks on its facilities in the western Delta accelerated in 2003 – 2004, resulting in the killing of company workers, shutting down 140,000 barrels of daily production, only to culminate in April 2006, Chevron officials made a statement that the company was not in support of military solutions in efforts to restore peace in the Niger Delta. However, this initial success did not hold much time. In August 2006, the federal government as well as the foreign oil corporations took again the containment and reprisal policy against MEND and its like.91

Thus, as from August 2006, the Nigerian federal government has adopted a new militaristic posture, publicly announcing in late August that it was now collaborating closely with the US

89 See on-line in: http://www.blacklooks.org/2006/10/behind_the_mask_-_emergence_of_mend_in_the_nigerdelta.html
90 See on-line in: http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,1193987,00.html
91 See on-line in: http://www.blacklooks.org/2006/10/behind_the_mask_-_emergence_of_mend_in_the_nigerdelta.html
and British governments to deploy more naval personnel to "root out oil rustlers, kidnappers and other undesirable elements from the Niger Delta and the wider Gulf of Guinea".92

Most likely, as a result of this posture of the government, later, a car bomb exploded outside a state government building in Port Harcourt on December 23, 2006, marking the first targeting of government installations by MEND, which up until then had focused its attacks on foreign oil companies. Following the car bomb explosion, the groups' statement, sent from an email address used by MEND, said it staged the bombing because the region's governors and other political figures "acted against the interest of the people of the Niger Delta, sabotaging all efforts at resource control for selfish reasons". It further said that "We will henceforth carry out attacks against these traitors in addition to attacks against oil installations".93

This posture on the part of the government might be explained as an attempt to generate political chaos in the Niger Delta during the general elections, due in April 2007, and thus provide an opportunity for Obasanjo to impose an interim government and extend his tenure beyond the constitutionally-stipulated two terms.

However, this political chaos and the characteristics of the MEND's actions against foreign oil companies take on a radical Islamic dimension. Thus, hostage-taking and the use of car bombs have been implemented in Nigeria for the first time in history and was lent from the Middle East. Furthermore, the first attack of MEND in late February, following its declaration of total oil war is timed perfectly with al-Qaeda's failed attack on Saudi Arabia's largest oil complex at Abqaiq on February 22, 2006. Were these attacks coordinated in advance? Or, was it a pure coincidence? In order to answer these questions, one has to examine the links, if exist at all, between MEND and al-Qaeda.

**The Al-Qaeda – MEND Connection**

On February 11, 2003, a bin Laden audio massage was broadcasted by al-Jazirah, in which he declared Nigeria as one of six "most qualified regions for liberation", together with Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen, from "their unjust and renegade ruling regimes, which are enslaved by the United States".94

Moreover, it has long been a goal of al-Qaeda to damage American economic power by attacking oil facilities and targets. In a December 2004 audiotape, bin Laden stated that "one of the main causes for our enemies' gaining hegemony over our country is their stealing our oil; therefore, you should make every effort in your power to stop the greatest theft in history of the natural resources of both present and future generations". Moreover, Ayman al-Zawahiri gave an interview in 2005, in which he called the Mujahideen to "focus their attacks on the oil wells stolen from the Muslims, because most of the revenues of this oil go to the enemies of Islam".95

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92 See on-line in: [http://www.blacklooks.org/2006/10/behind_the_mask_-_emergence_of_mend_in_the_niger_delta.html](http://www.blacklooks.org/2006/10/behind_the_mask_-_emergence_of_mend_in_the_niger_delta.html)
95 See on-line in: [http://www.frontpagemagazine.com/Articles/ReadArticle.asp?ID=25371](http://www.frontpagemagazine.com/Articles/ReadArticle.asp?ID=25371)
It is not surprising, then, that the Jihadi forums reported on the actions of MEND. Thus, on the same day in February, in which MEND declared war on all foreign oil companies and on their employees, it kidnapped nine employees of the US petrol company Willbros and threatened to use them as human shield. Information about this kidnapping was widely circulated in the Jihadi forums, which published photos of the nine employees under the title "photos of the Lions of Nigeria after having taken prisoner some Americans", with the following text: "Allah supports you oh Lions of Nigeria! These are the photos of the Mujahideen in Nigeria after the seizure of nine hostages from the US oil companies who rob the wealth of Muslim Nigeria and the world".96

Moreover, photos of MEND attacks against petroleum installations, including the December 15, 2006 deadly attack against a Shell oil facility in southeastern Bayelsa State, have appeared on radical Islamists websites in the Middle East with captions describing the combatants as "the Mujahideen in Nigeria", who are fighting "US oil companies who rob the wealth of Muslim Nigeria and of the world".97

Another link between MEND and al-Qaeda may be connected with Alhaji Mujahid Dokubo-Asari, who MEND wants his release. He is an extraordinary Ijaw leader, since whereas the Ijaw members are generally Christians; he is a devout Muslim with populist views and an anti-government stance that has made him a folk hero amongst certain members of the local population. Asari is also an outspoken admirer of Osama bin Laden, with whom he is suspected to have financial links, and has drawn parallels between his war against the Nigerian government and al-Qaeda's struggle against the West.98

Though MEND is not connected with the Wahhabi Shari'iah movement in northern Nigeria or the Nigeria Taliban, and maybe through them to al-Qaeda, another possible link to al-Qaeda, besides Asari, might be "the former Bayelsa State governor, Depriye Alamieyeseigha, MEND's main financial supporter, who is currently facing extradition to the United Kingdom, where he skipped bail on money laundering charges. He is suspected of backing terrorism and—based on intelligence reports forwarded to the British by the Nigerian authorities—of smuggling arms and of enjoying close links with Osama bin Laden".99

But, the most threatening effect posed by this increased violence in the River Delta against government facilities and foreign oil companies is the potential for a goal-oriented alignment between MEND and the radical Islamists abroad. This is not to say that radical Muslim groups will recruit members from MEND or vice versa. Instead, MEND may provide inspiration to radical Islamic groups who are witnessing its success, even through the Jihadi forums. Damaging America's economy via targeting the oil industry has long been one of al-Qaeda's missions. If MEND continues to be successful in targeting and hurting Nigeria's oil economy, it is entirely possible that future successful attacks may give rise to other attacks conducted by terrorist organizations across the globe.

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Thus, whereas al-Qaeda was a source of inspiration for MEND, most likely through Asari, MEND, following his successes will become a source of inspiration for al-Qaeda. This is the most difficult threat the world is facing from MEND and al-Qaeda.

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GSPC: Al-Qaeda's Ally in the Sahel: A Threat to France?
By Deborah Touboul

Introduction
On September 11, 2006, Ayman al-Zawahiri declared on behalf of bin Laden that the GSPC (Groupe Salafiste pour la prédication et le combat, or the "Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat") was now an integral part of al-Qaeda—information confirmed by the group itself just three days later. Thus, it was the first organization based in Africa that formally joined al-Qaeda, together with an unknown organization called "Al-Qaeda in Sudan and Africa."

The GSPC is a militant Sunni Islamist group, which aims to overthrow the Algerian regime and establish an Islamic state instead. The GSPC was founded by Hassan Hattab, a former GIA (Groupe Islamique Arme, or "Armed Islamic Group") regional commander, who separated from the GIA in 1998 in protest of its slaughter of innocent civilians. Following an amnesty in 1999, many former GIA fighters laid down their arms, but a few remained active, including members of the GSPC. Estimates of GSPC members vary from a few hundreds to 4,000. In September 2003, it was reported that Hattab had been deposed as the National Emir of the GSPC and replaced by Nabil Sahraoui (Sheikh Abu Ibrahim Mustafa), a 39 year-old former GIA commander subsequently reported to have pledged the GSPC's allegiance to al-Qaeda, a step opposed by Hattab. Following the death of Sahraoui in June 2004, Abu Mus'ab Abd al-Wadood became the leader of the GSPC.

Allegations of GSPC's links to al-Qaeda predate the attacks of September 11, 2001. After the deposition of Hassan Hattab, the group's founder, in 2003, various leaders of the group have pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda. Thus, the GSPC switched gradually from commitment to a nationalist agenda, i.e., Jihad inside Algeria, to al-Qaeda's objectives of global Jihad. Similar claims of links between the GSPC and Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi are based on letters sent to Zarqawi by the GSPC leader, Abu Mus'ab Abd al-Wadood. In a September 2005 interview, Abu Mus'ab Abd al-Wadood hailed Zarqawi's actions in Iraq.

Thus, it is no surprise that Algerian officials and authorities from neighboring countries have long speculated that the GSPC may be active outside Algeria. However, initially, these activities were regarded as having to do with the GSPC's involvement with the black market—smuggling drugs, arms, and cigarettes, protection rackets and money across the

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100 The video-tape was circulated in 10 September 2006, in all the Jihadi forums. A full transcript of the tape in Arabic was posted in 11 September. See on-line in: [http://www.al-hesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=84735](http://www.al-hesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=84735) For the transcript of the part about the GSPC see on-line in the web site of the group: [http://www.moonnight9876.com/pages/bushra.html](http://www.moonnight9876.com/pages/bushra.html)


The Project for the Research of Islamist Movements (PRISM) Herzliya, ISRAEL

www.e-prism.org

The borders of Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Libya, and Chad—which provides the group's financial source.103

The Sahel – A Safe Haven for the GSPC

Following the declaration of GSPC's joining to al-Qaeda and its ever-growing commitment to global Jihad, another source of concern for the West, as well as for the West and Central African states, is the GSPC's growing presence and activity outside of Algeria, most notably in Tunisia, Morocco and the Sahel, the latter being increasingly used as a recruitment and battle ground. According to French intelligence, the GSPC is composed of approximately 500-800 armed men, of which presently 400-600 are located in Algeria, and about 100-200 are wandering around Mauritania, Mali, and Niger.104 The Sahel represents a haven in many ways for groups like the GSPC. The area is immense and not very populated; the borders are not materialized or controlled; illegal trafficking is omnipresent, making it easy for the terrorists to supply themselves with weapons and people; the population is Muslim and poor, thus welcoming to the Islamist newcomers, who provide them with schools, medical supplies and other basic services.105 Hence, Islamists take advantage of this situation to recruit, plan and carry out attacks. Their involvement in people's everyday life further allows them to slowly become the voice of the people, and even a political instrument for leaders.106

As far as recruitment is concerned, one may ask if there is a radical Islamic infrastructure from which to recruit. Most of the population living in the Sahel is Muslim; the majority practice Sufi Islam, and only a few practice radical Islam. In Niger, some people belong to the Saudi/Wahhabi inspired radicalism. The Wahhabi-inspired Muslims have operated principally in Dosso and Maradi, where they have instigated violence against resident Sufis. The radical Muslims have organized themselves into two groups: the Association of Islamic Groups and Culture, led by Cheikh Souleiman Youssouf, and the Niger Islamic Association, led by El Hajj Aboubacar Issa. Furthermore, as in all of the Sahel states, preachers from Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Libya and elsewhere come to the Sahel to preach. Thus, in Niger for instance, noticeable numbers of teachers and clerics are arguing that political reform, the end of corruption, and the amelioration of economic life will be made possible by a return to a more militant form of Islam and restoration of Shari'ah.107

In Chad, only a minority of the country's Muslims are considered radicals. They are led by Imam Mahamadou Mahamat, also known as Sheikh Faki Suzuki, in N'Djamena. Because of Mahamat's radical activities, the Chadian government banned him for extended periods of time from preaching; and from 1998 to 1999, he was under house arrest, being charged with inciting religious violence. In July 2002, the state's Superior Council of Islamic Affairs

107 See on-line in: http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0PBZ/is_1_86/ai_n16346154/pg_1
rebuked Mahamat and another Imam, Haroun Idriss Abou-Mandela, for preaching religious and ethnic division. In 1999, the government arrested and detained for a year yet another Imam, Sheikh Mahamad Marouf, for preaching anti-Tijaniyyah diatribes.108

In Mali, Islam has always been practiced in a rather moderate, tolerant form, with considerable leeway given to practitioners of Islam mixed with traditional African religions and to those who favor African religions in purer forms. The considerable influence of the Qadiriyyah Sufi sect in Mali has moderated Wahhabi tendencies and helped counterbalance Saudi Arabian and Libyan support to Malian Islamic movements. While Wahhabi-influenced Jihad movements in Senegal had some effect in Mali, this effect did not last long. Wahhabi or Jihadi movements have not yet found a place in Malian society. Despite this tradition, a harder, more militant form of Islamic politics has appeared recently in Bamako, the capital. Imam Mahmoud Dicko, the influential director of Bamako's Islamic Radio, is the leader of this movement. Dicko has asserted that former President Alpha Oumar Kanore's close relationship with the US has contributed to and accelerated Mali's poverty. Coupled with the GSPC's appearance in the Sahel, Dicko's anti-US campaign might inspire groups like the Tuaregs, who rebelled against the central government in the early 1990s, to throw in their lot with the Jihadis.109

In Mauritania, the regime takes a repressive posture against all those who threaten its stability, first and foremost among them, the radical Muslims. Moreover, the Mauritanian government actively monitors mosques, madrassas, and the foreign philanthropic organizations that support them.110

The GSPC does not only recruit in the Sahel; it has become one of the greatest sources of insecurity, regularly carrying out attacks throughout the region, and creating partnerships with other radical groups such as the GICM (Groupe Islamique des combattants marocains, or "Islamic Group of Moroccan Combatants"), which was behind the Madrid bombings in 2004, or the GMPJ (Groupe mauritanien pour le prêche et le Jihad, or "Mauritanian Group for Preaching and Jihad").111 The Sahel is now frequently referred to as "the new Afghanistan" for al-Qaeda, as US government representatives often say.112 Some of the major assaults launched in the region by the GSPC include the carrying-out of an ambush last October against a rebel Tuareg group, killing seven of them; this was meant as a retort to the killing of GSPC's number two, known as Abdelhamid or Abohola, the previous month.113 On June 3, 2006, the groups also attacked a Mauritanian military base in the country's North-East desert, killing 15 soldiers and wounding 17. In Mali, in March 2003, the GSPC kidnapped 32 European tourists in the Algerian Sahara. Most recently, warnings were issued by the French intelligence services that an ambush was being planned on the car rally

108 See on-line in: http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0PBZ/is_1_86/ai_n16346154/pg_1
109 See on-line in: http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0PBZ/is_1_86/ai_n16346154/pg_1
110 See on-line in: http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0PBZ/is_1_86/ai_n16346154/pg_1
113 http://www.elwatan.com/spip.php?page=article&id_article=52638
between Lisbon and Dakar, which took place on January 16-17, 2007; the itinerary was changed, and three Mauritanians were arrested.114

The list of incidents and attacks in the last few months and years is quite long. Yet, many analysts argue that the GSPC does not represent a direct threat to the Sahel; it would be more of a "nuisance," according to Louis Caprioli, head of French intelligence's antiterrorist unit.115 The group's purpose in the region would be more to regroup the Salafists than to launch Jihad there.116 Plus, the Sahel can be quite a problematic region: the climate is rough; the local populations, as we saw with the Tuaregs, can be very antagonistic to the group's presence and activity; and Western forces (American and French) are getting increasingly involved in the region, in an attempt to maintain some level of stability and to prevent the growth of Islamism.117 Moreover, the GSPC's main targets still remain within Algeria and Tunisia. Most recently, the group was held responsible for two deadly attacks in Tunisia (December 23, 2006 and January 3, 2007), as well as for an anti-American assault in Algiers on December 10, 2006.118 Finally, the region's governments do not remain passive; the Algerian government especially has been active and successful in fighting the group.119 The Mauritanian security services also announced the arrest of tens of GSPC members, who were presumably planning attacks and involved in previous major ones, such as the killing of soldiers in Mauritania in June 2005, the Madrid attacks in March 2004, and even the embassy assaults in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998.120

The GSPC's Threat to France
That the GSPC might not be a threat to the Sahel does not mean it is not one for France. If the region continues to be a safe haven for radical Islamists and truly becomes a meeting/recruiting/training base for all Jihad groups in the region—like Afghanistan was—then there are reasons to believe that there will be, sooner or later, serious repercussions on France.

France, which already suffers from Islamist terrorism for more than a decade through the activities of the GIA, has officially become one of the main targets of the al-Qaeda-led global Jihadism. Al-Qaeda had already emitted a series of threats against the French,121 described as crusaders, traitors and apostates at the same level as Americans. Yet, this new alliance makes the threat more real and credible.122 Since then, the GSPC's leader, Abdel Kader Droukdel, alias Abou Moussab Abdelouadoud, has already reiterated several times the group's intention to attack French soil and citizens, as his message only a couple of weeks ago (January 8, 2007) demonstrates. In addition, the GSPC, which used to be mostly confined to Algeria, is

114 http://www.lemonde.fr/cgi-bin/ACHATS/acheter.cgi?offre=ARCHIVES&type_item=ART_ARCH_30J&objet_id=965734
115 http://www.la-croix.com/afp.static/pages/070119074305.3afmek3p.htm
116 Ibid.
118 http://www.jlturbet.net/categorie-340591.html
119 http://www.esisc.eu/news.asp
120 Ibid,
121 See list from October 2002 at: http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/actualites/20060914.OBS1897
122 The video-tape was circulated in 10 September 2006, in all the Jihadi forums. A full transcript of the tape in Arabic was posted in 11 September. See on-line in: http://www.al-hesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=84735 For the transcript of the part about the GSPC see on-line in the web site of the group: http://www.moonnight9876.com/pages/bushra.html
expanding its reach to the rest of the Maghreb and to the Sahel. As a result, the French authorities—very aware of the threat—have officially identified the group as one of its top sources of concern; but how real is the threat?

First of all, one might ask, "Why France?" France is often described as one of the most pro-Arab states in the West. Yet, Islamists do not follow the same logic when identifying their enemies. As the French terrorism expert Alain Rodier notes, "France holds a special place in the heart of radical Islamists." Indeed, the latter find reasons dating back to 732 to justify their targeting of France. Historically, France is thought of as the state that: stopped the conquest of the Moors in Poitiers in 732; initiated most of the Crusades led by the Pope; colonized Islamic lands for many years; sided with the Israelis in 1956; participated in the first Gulf War in 1991-92; etc. More recently, France was accused of maltreating its Muslims (referring specifically to the ban on wearing the hijab); of being a supporter of the Algerian President, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who has been waging war against Algerian Islamists; and of participating to the war in Afghanistan, and to UNIFIL in Lebanon. For all these reasons and more, the GSPC declared France was its number one enemy.

The question now is how real is the threat? According to French intelligence reports, no clearly identified GSPC units exist on French soil, but some dormant cells are likely to have developed. The organization is suspected to have built close links with French nationals, including previously incarcerated GIA members or new converts to Islam. In December 2003, out of the estimated 50,000 French converts to Islam, an estimated 1,100 were identified as radicals, and an estimated 5,000 individuals in France were counted as sympathizers and/or militants of Salafism as of February 2005. In addition, the GSPC's recent allegiance to al-Qaeda and the subsequent rise in its activity create concern that it might only be a question of time until France suffers an attack like the ones in England and Spain. Just over the course of 2006, the group claimed responsibility for more than a hundred attacks in Algeria alone, and it has been further expanding its international reach. It is also feared that Jihadi methodology applied elsewhere in the world, such as suicide bombings, might have an impact on the GSPC's methods, now that it is officially associated with al-Qaeda. Like many other Islamist groups, the GSPC has made every effort to recruit and send its dissidents to Iraq for training purposes. All things considered, in Rodier's words, "the members of GSPC have the will and the technical capacities to lead spectacular activities on [French] soil." What is left to find out is when, where, and how.

To sum up, the Sahel might serve, in addition to its role as safe haven, as an organizational point for future attacks in Europe, as well as in West Africa and the Sahel. In this, the GSPC might harness an Islamist infrastructure based on the already prevalent radical groups in these states, and use them to plan attacks in Europe and in North and West Africa.

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123 http://www.cf2r.org/fr/article/article-pourquoi-France-menacee-par-GSPC-3-58.php
124 http://www.lemonde.fr/web/imprimer_article/0,1-0@2-3226,36-367343,0.html
125 http://www.rfi.fr/actufr/articles/081/article_46151.asp
127 http://www.lemonde.fr/cgi-bin/ACHATS/acheter.cgi?offre=ARCHIVES&type_item=ART_ARCH_30J&objet_id=965733