

TRANSNATIONAL THREATS UPDATE

Volume 7 • Number 8 • October 2009

“Globalization has broadened the number of threats and challenges facing the United States. . . . The nation requires more from our Intelligence Community than ever before and consequently we need to do our business better, both internally, through greater collaboration across disciplines, and externally, by engaging more of the expertise available outside the Intelligence Community.”

—The Honorable J. Michael McConnell, Director of National Intelligence, Statement for the Record to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, February 27, 2008

CONTENTS	
Terrorism	1
Regional Security Threats	3
Drug Trafficking	4
Espionage	5

Terrorism

Turbulence in the Taliban/al Qaeda Relationship?

Although a number of prominent commentators argue that cooperation between the Taliban and al Qaeda is at an all-time high, recent statements from the groups suggest their relationship may in fact be regressing. It is well known that the Taliban and al Qaeda were quite distinct prior to the 9/11 attacks, but author Peter Bergen, for example, says “in recent years, Taliban leaders have drawn especially close to al Qaeda...[t]oday, at the leadership level, the Taliban and al Qaeda function more or less as a single entity.” This argument is often cited to advocate an increase in U.S. forces in Afghanistan, since military action to destroy al Qaeda enjoys far more public support than a campaign to root out the entire Taliban.

Recent chatter on jihadi media forums shows furious verbal infighting, however, casting doubt on Bergen’s assertion. Vahid Brown, an FBI instructor at the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, noticed that al Qaeda directly contradicted Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Omar in a recent series of public communiqués. The rare disagreements got extremely heated, and the sharpness of the insults involved is noteworthy. While it remains to be seen how extensive these disagreements will become,

there can be no doubt that such starkly conflicting messages potentially signal an impending breakup.

The disagreement erupted after Mullah Omar, the former leader of the Taliban-ruled state of Afghanistan, broadcast a holiday message that rankled al Qaeda. Mullah Omar marked the end of the holy month of Ramadan, *Eid al-Fitr*, by saying the Taliban is a “robust Islamic and nationalist movement... [which] wants to maintain good and positive relations with all neighbors based on mutual respect... [and the Taliban] assure[s] all countries that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan... will not extend its hand to jeopardize others, as it itself does not allow others to jeopardize us.” Although this message clearly echoes Taliban foreign policy of the period 1996–2001, during which time the Taliban never engaged in transnational adventurism, al Qaeda ideologues publicly blasted the statement. Al Qaeda deputy commander Ayman al-Zawahiri, and leading al Qaeda intellectuals Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and Abu Yahya al-Libi condemned Omar’s “dangerous utterances” and railed against the illegitimacy of any “national” movements, which divide the Islamic *umma*. Furthermore, Maqdisi said abandoning jihad made the Taliban sound like Hamas, which is continuously excoriated by al Qaeda as a sellout organization for its willingness to conclude cease-fires with Israel. The Taliban fired back on October 13, 2009, sending an open letter to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) reiterating its pledge that “[t]he Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan wants to have good and positive relations with all its neighbors based on mutual respect and open a new chapter of good neighborliness of mutual cooperation and economic development.” The SCO, which consists of Russia, China, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan, is a prime target for al Qaeda, which views its secular, autocratic

governments as apostates that oppress Muslims and must be violently overthrown.

Adlene Hicheur: French Physicist, al Qaeda Supporter?

On October 8, Adlene Hicheur, a physicist and dual French-Algerian citizen, was arrested by French authorities and charged with conspiring with al Qaeda's Algerian affiliate known as al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). He allegedly had been supplying the group with money and planning major attacks on European soil.

French authorities had been tracking Dr. Hicheur's encoded e-mails for several months. He had been active in a European-based jihadi group until it was broken up by a string of arrests last December. He had not been a major enough player in that ring to warrant an arrest, but it appears that once that group was broken up, he gravitated toward AQIM while Belgian and French authorities continued to track his activities. The French authorities found that he had drawn up rudimentary attack plans targeting various locations in France and elsewhere in Europe. They uncovered a plan he had devised to create an explosion in an oil refinery that could destroy a major city. However, French authorities stress that the plans were far from developed enough to execute.

France also accuses Dr. Hicheur of supplying AQIM with substantial financial support. Bank records show that he recently sent 13,000 euros to Algeria. Adlene Hicheur's brother, who was also arrested but later released, said that the money transfer was to purchase land in Algeria and denied all charges against himself and his brother.

Most striking about Adlene Hicheur are his credentials. He received a Ph. D. from the University of Savoie in France and worked as a nuclear physicist at CERN, the nuclear physics laboratory made famous for its nuclear collider meant to simulate the Big Bang. Dr. Hicheur is unlike many previously identified European-based terrorists in that he had a promising career in a field that requires highly intelligent and highly trained personnel. The typical European terrorist recruit is young, undereducated, disillusioned, and without a promising career path. Dr. Hicheur's case has brought a disturbing new angle to Europe's struggle against terrorism.

Al Qaeda Threatens China over Uighurs

On October 6, 2009, al Qaeda preacher Abu Yahya al-Libi released a video entitled "East Turkestan: The Forgotten Wound," calling for a defensive jihad in northwestern China on behalf of the Uighur Muslims of China's Xianjiang province, or what Uighurs call East

Turkestan. *The Christian Science Monitor* describes Libi as "a rising star in the jihadi world" and says the "prolific jihad video star...about 40 years old, at most... [is considered by some] the likely eventual replacement for Osama bin Laden." This is thought to be the first time that al Qaeda central has threatened China, as previous threats against Beijing, first issued in July 2009, were made by AQIM.

Libi catalogued a laundry list of Chinese transgressions in the region and repeatedly decried seven ways in which the "godless Communists" and "thugs" were oppressing his fellow Muslims. He lamented the fact that many Muslims are unaware of the plight of East Turkestan and castigated China for, in his words:

- Trying to "dissolve" Islamic identity in East Turkestan, just as Europe did in al-Andalus (Spain) and the Jews are doing in Palestine.
- Flooding East Turkestan with Han Chinese by giving them money, jobs, land, and agricultural assistance to colonize Xianjiang.
- Limiting the growth of the Muslim population by using abortions and taxation to curtail the number of Uighur births.
- Closing all Islamic madrassas, institutes, and universities, and banning Islamic religious teaching and Qur'anic instruction.
- Robbing the Uighurs of the natural resources in East Turkestan, such as oil, gold, and iron, by making the Muslims extract it and then looting their wealth to further the godless Chinese state.
- Killing more than 200,000 Muslims, and making many more fall ill and flee the area, by turning East Turkestan into the largest nuclear weapons test zone in the world.
- Separating Muslim women from their families and forcing them to work in factories in the east. This causes some to lose all ties to their families and culture and become atheist, while some even kill themselves.

Libi closed by calling the July 5 riots in Urumqi, the capital of Xianjiang, a Uighur intifada, evoking the Palestinian uprisings against Israel. He then declared "[a]s for the state of atheism and stubbornness, it is [doomed] to extinction.... [China] will experience

that which the Russian bear experienced in terms of disintegration and division.”

Regional Security Threats

Accusations Fly in Wake of Team Massacre

The fate of a kidnapped amateur Colombian soccer team was revealed on October 28 and 29 when bodies of 11 of the 12 players were found scattered throughout the countryside in Venezuela. The sole survivor escaped by feigning death after being shot in the neck.

The men were taken while playing a pick-up soccer game. The kidnappers are believed to belong to the National Liberation Army (ELN), a Colombian separatist paramilitary group that funds itself through kidnapping ransoms. According to the survivor’s description of events, the kidnapping and subsequent murders were the result of some sort of mistaken identity. Venezuela’s vice president Ramon Carrizalez has accused the soccer team of being a paramilitary group sent to destabilize Caracas. However, Colombian officials pointed out that all the athletes were peanut vendors and the team name was “Los Maniceros” or “The Peanuts.” Supporting this evidence, the family of one of the victims said that he had no part in paramilitary activities and was employed as a street vendor.

The account given by the survivor provides further details in support of the Colombian government’s argument. He described the kidnappers frantically arguing, and then finally agreeing that the team could not be released because they could identify their kidnappers. The surviving team member was then told to kneel and was shot. He pretended to be dead until he had an opportunity to escape across the border to Colombia. When the perpetrators discovered his escape, they tried again to cover their tracks. Colombian authorities had to move the sole survivor from an ordinary hospital to a military hospital after an unknown man tried to gain access to his room.

This tragic event has escalated the tensions between the Colombian and Venezuelan governments. Colombia has denied that the men were part of any paramilitary organization. Colombia’s president Álvaro Uribe demanded a full investigation and better border control on the part of the Venezuelans. Venezuela said that it would investigate, but maintains that the men killed were involved in paramilitary actions. Further complicating relations, Venezuela’s president Hugo Chavez called the defense minister of Colombia a “mental retard” for his

relationship with the United States and comments he made about Venezuela.

Yemen Accuses Iranian Sailors of Arms Smuggling

In recent weeks, the Yemeni government has begun to accuse nearby Shi’a states, especially Iran, of supporting separatist militants in the north. On October 28, Yemen claimed to have captured an Iranian ship filled with anti-tank shells that was destined for rebel forces near Sa’ada. Five Iranians and one Indian were arrested. Iran’s state media first called the reports a fabrication and then later denied the existence of weapons on board or ties between the government of Iran and the ship and its crew.

Yemeni officials announced that the men they arrested admitted to be weapons trainers for the anti-tank shells aboard the vessel and that they were funded by the Iranian government. They allegedly planned to drop the load, train the Houthi fighters, collect injured Iranian militants (which Iran insists have no presence in Yemen), and return to Iran. Yemen said that further details from interrogations would be made public as they were uncovered.

After acknowledging that an Iranian ship had been seized, Iran launched its response to the Yemeni claims. Iran cited “official documentation” as evidence that the ship was an empty merchant ship heading for the Mediterranean. The papers trace back to a port in the United Arab Emirates.

Iran has questionable credibility, however, with regard to arms trading. At least twice since the beginning of 2009, the United States has intercepted Iranian arms shipments headed for Syria, supposedly destined for Hezbollah. In a developing story, Israel believes it has just captured a secret weapons shipment headed from Iran to Syria.

The incident in Yemen exposes the tense relations between Iran and Yemen. Iran’s media has staunchly denied any relationship between Iran and the conflict in Yemen. When Yemen first declared that Iranian militants had been captured, Iran pointed out that Yemen provided no evidence to support its accusation. Indeed, up to this point, no connections beyond religion have tied Iran to the separatists. In return, Iran accused Yemen of collaborating with al Qaeda to bolster its fight against the Houthis.

Indian Drawdown Highlights J&K Disparity

After a peaceful stretch in the disputed Jammu and Kashmir state, Indian military officials announced the withdrawal of 15,000 troops from the region on October 27. The drawdown comes on the back of nearly five years of dialogue between India and Pakistan and a contentious

March troop surge in Kashmir. The troops will leave only the Jammu region, which is considerably more stable than Kashmir, where security forces report an increase in militant and separatist support.

After a tour of the region, Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh voiced his confidence in the peace process and said “the responsibility for maintaining law and order in the state will be increasingly devolved on the Jammu and Kashmir police.” While no moves have been made to lower force levels in the Kashmir region, which according to a Reuters report is estimated to have 500,000 Indian security personnel, the move toward autonomy in Jammu has good implications for the future of that part of the troubled region. Jammu has embraced the step forward and no major disturbances have been reported. The last time a withdrawal was attempted was in November of 2004, but almost immediately following the announcement, militant power struggles began and the government reneged on its offer.

Even though the drawdown was meant to be a gesture of progress to the citizens of the disputed region, it appears to have incensed certain factions. An incident on October 31 suggested the presence of troops in Kashmir was justified, when two police officers were shot and killed by militants while walking their beat. In the wake of the violence, rioting in support of the militants was reported by Pakistani media.

Further upsetting Kashmiris were three separate reports of landmine casualties shortly before the Jammu drawdown announcement. Five children were injured and two men were killed when landmines were accidentally triggered along the heavily fortified border zone.

Drug Trafficking

Drug Wars Explode in Rio de Janeiro

Drug-related violence has once again exploded across Rio de Janeiro’s infamous *favelas*, or slums. Street battles have left at least 40 dead since October 19, including three police officers who perished when their helicopter was shot down on October 22. Police have managed only to maintain a constant presence in four major favelas out of more than 500 that are located around Rio. The rest are controlled by heavily armed drug cartels.

The Rio de Janeiro drug cartels have controlled almost all of the favelas around the city since they formed in the 1960s. They have a massive stockpile of weapons acquired through illegal arms trades, or, as in March of 2006, by robbing the Brazilian National Army. Their main

revenue streams are derived from trafficking cocaine throughout Brazil and South America and extorting from the favela inhabitants.

Meanwhile, there is a constant power struggle between the three major gangs: the Friends of Friends, the Third Pure Command, and the Red Command. On October 19, the Red Command launched an invasion into Morro do Macaco, a major favela controlled by the Friends of Friends. The Friends of Friends responded by jointly entrenching themselves into Morro do Macaco and sending out squads to attack Red Command-controlled favelas. The Third Pure Command has been attacking vulnerable favelas in the hopes of spreading control, as well. The violence has been almost constant and spread across the favelas controlled by the rivals.

The police response to the street battles has been to launch raids on the most dangerous favelas. So far, 10 raids have been executed, leading to hundreds of arrests. These actions do not appear to have had a lasting impact. Residents and political figures alike seem wary of putting too much faith in the ability of the state to exercise control in these areas.

Since Rio has been named the host city for the 2016 Olympics, Mayor Eduardo Paes has spoken of drastic changes and bolstered security. The changes will need to be incredibly significant, as the aforementioned Morro do Macaco is just a mile from the soccer stadium that is the proposed site for the 2016 Opening Ceremonies and the location for several World Cup soccer games in 2014.

Serbia Targets the Drug Trade

The Serbian government led a major crackdown on drug trafficking during the month of October, leading to hundreds of arrests and the confiscation of hundreds of millions of dollars worth of illegal goods.

Early on the morning of October 31, Serbian police executed coordinated raids of some 600 locations believed to harbor drug traffickers. The raids, called Operation Morava, were executed to stem the flow of drugs through the Balkans into Europe.

Large quantities of drugs, unlicensed weapons, and other illegal paraphernalia were confiscated during the raids. The Interior ministry marked the operation as successful, adding that “\$1,052,000 forged U.S. dollars were also discovered, as well as €120,000, around RSD 200,000, four stolen cars, and 20 high-class cars owned by the drug dealers.”

More than 500 individuals were arrested, 100 of whom remain in custody. Six of those arrested are the subject of international arrest warrants, and an additional 100 arrest warrants have been issued for persons still at large.

The drug bust comes on the heels of a massive bust by the Uruguayan and Serbian security services and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency. The joint action on October 16 resulted in the capture of a Serbian and Uruguayan and the seizure of a 2.8-ton shipment of cocaine just off the Uruguayan coast that was destined for Europe. The street value of the cocaine was estimated to be around €250 million. In the wake of the bust, another Serbian and two Montenegrins were also arrested.

These operations signal that the Serbian government is serious about addressing the flow of drugs through its territory. The government started an effective anti-drug campaign targeting teens, which has already shown substantial results. Despite these efforts, the drug trade continued to flourish in Serbia because the Balkan state has proven to be a strategically located corridor into western Europe from the east. The Serbian mafia has proved a difficult adversary for the government. The interior ministry said that in 2009 that there were as many as 40 major organized crime syndicates. It seems that an effective way to combat them is to fight their narcotics activities.

Espionage

American Scientist a Spy for Israel?

An American scientist who held a number of senior government and defense contractor positions was arrested recently after a sting operation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Stewart D. Nozette, 52, of Chevy Chase, Maryland, was indicted October 21 on two counts of attempted espionage after allegedly giving sensitive government information to an undercover FBI agent posing as an Israeli intelligence officer. Nozette spent time at the Energy Department's Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, worked as a contractor for NASA and the Defense Department, and held a top-secret security clearance for several years.

The MIT-educated scientist allegedly passed the FBI agent classified information for several months through dead drops in a post office box in exchange for \$11,000. At the final meeting, this time in person at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, DC, Nozette allegedly told the FBI agent that he, Nozette, had "crossed the Rubicon" by sharing so much sensitive data and demanded \$2 million for the secrets. He also seems to have made preparation for flight;

Reuters reports he "sought an Israeli passport with an alias [from the FBI agent] and opened a safe deposit box in California in which he stashed three computer drives, eight videotapes, 55 gold South African Krugerrand coins worth roughly \$50,000, and \$30,000 in savings bonds...Nozette also told the agent he had hidden classified information in safe deposit boxes in addition to the gold coins."

It is unclear what drove Nozette to spy. According to *The Washington Post*, "[his] friends said they couldn't come up with a motive for Nozette's suspected conduct. Nozette, the son of a well-off Chicago plastics executive who worked on the Manhattan Project in the 1940s, never seemed to need money. There were no outward signs that he might be upset with his country." The FBI affidavit states that when discussing payment and espionage with the undercover FBI agent, Nozette said "I don't get recruited by Mossad every day.... I knew this day would come.... [I just] had a feeling." At the same time, authorities pointedly maintain there is no evidence at this time that Nozette was actually approached by the Israeli intelligence service and recruited to commit espionage.

Finally, there is suspicion that his actions may have been motivated by debt. As the *Post* reports, "[Nozette] pleaded guilty in January to overbilling the U.S. government by about \$265,000 and faced at least two years in prison. The case was sealed because Nozette was cooperating with authorities investigating unrelated corruption charges. He had told a colleague that he planned to flee to India or Israel if the government sought to put him in jail for fraud. He told the co-worker he planned to share everything he knew with officials of those governments."

New Report: China is preparing for IW

The discovery of Ghostnet in April shocked analysts from around the world. This China-based cyber espionage system was found to have infiltrated 103 countries' political and media networks. While no direct connection was found between Ghostnet and the Chinese government, one specific target of Ghostnet implies a shared interest. Tibet's network was heavily monitored by Ghostnet. Not many people would target Tibet, so this implies a link between the government and the espionage system. Regardless, Ghostnet highlighted the vulnerabilities of computer networks around the world and heightened the U.S. government's interest in protecting information. Around that time, Northrop Grumman was commissioned to analyze the Chinese agenda in information warfare (IW).

Northrop released its report this month entitled *Report on the Capability of the People's Republic of China to*

Conduct Cyber Warfare and Computer Network Exploitation. The report found striking evidence and information on China's aggressive program to advance its technological capabilities. China has stated in the past that it intends to become a technology leader, but this new report makes it clear that the goals are not entirely benign. Areas of focused development include corporate espionage, satellite defense, and government system hacking and disruption. It is exceedingly difficult to find direct ties between the government of China and previous attacks, but links such as the particular interest of Ghostnet in Tibet's network seem indicative of the Chinese government's involvement or interests.

Well-documented cases of hacking and phishing have been perpetrated against government and media sites around the world. However, the report brought to light many other areas of information warfare not frequently acknowledged. The report also spoke at length about information warfare at the stratospheric level. Satellite disruption would severely hinder a military's ability to communicate or deploy. A military without GPS in modern warfare is severely handicapped. The strategic advantage in interfering with an adversary's satellite would be huge. China has been developing both IT methods of interfering and also much more physical responses. In 2007, China successfully shot down an old weather satellite just to test that very capability.

Additionally, cases of corporate espionage have cropped up repeatedly. It is clear from these occurrences that U.S. companies, and especially government contractors, have to fortify their networks. Contractors in particular can provide an easily exploitable link to U.S. government information.

As the Northrop Grumman report outlined, China is well on its way to being a leader in information warfare. While the country has undeniably been the source of countless amateur attacks over the last decade, China appears to be increasingly well-prepared to launch sophisticated IW attacks through organs of the state. At the same time, as the report makes clear, these attacks are difficult to defeat in part because they are almost always deniable and difficult to link to the Chinese government.

This update is produced by the Transnational Threats Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and provides monthly news on terrorism, drug trafficking, organized crime, money laundering, and other transnational threats. The *TNT Update* draws primarily on international media sources, including the Associated Press, ITAR-TASS,

Agence France Presse, Reuters, Xinhua News Agency, World Tribune, Afghan News, and others.

CSIS does not take specific public policy positions; accordingly, all views, positions, and conclusions in this publication should be understood to be solely those of the author(s).

© 2009 by the Center for Strategic and International Studies. All rights reserved.