

# Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

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## IN THIS ISSUE:

FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT IN THE IRAQI INSURGENCY By Ahmed Hashim .....	1
SHI'ITE INSURGENCY IN YEMEN: IRANIAN INTERVENTION OR MOUNTAIN REVOLT? By Andrew McGregor .....	4
WHY EXTREMISM IS ON THE RISE IN UZBEKISTAN By Igor Rotar .....	6
HIZB UT-TAHRIR IN UZBEKISTAN AND KAZAKHSTAN: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS By Stephen Schwartz .....	8



An insurgency in Yemen  
has led to 300-400 deaths

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## Foreign Involvement in the Iraqi Insurgency

By Ahmed Hashim

The Iraqi insurgency spiked again in August 2004 when Muqtada al-Sadr took the offensive against the transitional Iraqi government of Prime Minister Iyad Allawi and the Multi-National Force of U.S. and other foreign troops, as the former coalition is now known. It was optimistically believed that following the return to Iraqi sovereignty at the end of June, the insurgency by both Sunni and Shi'a groups would wither away. It has not, and the issue of foreign involvement with insurgent groups – which has hovered in the background since last year – came to the foreground in the summer of 2004. U.S. General Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, highlighted the issue with regard to Syria when he adamantly stated: “We know that the pathway into Iraq for many foreign fighters is through Syria. It’s a fact. We know it. The Syrians know it.” [1] More recently, the claim by the Iraqi Defense Minister Hazem Sha‘alan in July that Iran was interfering in Iraqi domestic affairs by allowing or promoting infiltration into Iraq has led to a significant *contretemps* between the two neighbors.

The question of foreign insurgents in Iraq presents a particularly tangled problem. Layers of complexity beneath a seemingly simple surface make it difficult to untangle fact from fiction when discussing the issue. Though the Bush administration has maintained that attacks are the work of “regime dead-enders” and foreign infiltrators, hard empirical evidence – often from the U.S. military forces – indicates that the foreign element is minuscule. Evidence which shows that of 8,000 suspected insurgents detained in Iraq, only 127 hold foreign passports, supports this latter claim. But a simple head-count does not tell the whole story. The insurgency’s foreign element has had a greater impact than mere numbers would lead us to believe.

## Un-sponsored Foreign Insurgents

This insurgency has seen its share of outraged and disgruntled individuals, Arab nationalists, and “un-sponsored” religious extremists make their way into Iraq to fight the foreign occupation. Many Palestinians were recruited to fight in Iraq in 2002, and some joined the regime’s irregular force, the Feda’yeen Saddam. [2] Similarly, large numbers of Syrian volunteers with close tribal and cultural links to Iraqis across the border felt it was their duty to fight. These individuals received no encouragement from their government. One such fighter, a 26-year-old Syrian named “Abed,” decided to fight in Iraq barely a week after the war began because, as he put it, “there was something inside that made me explode.” Another, a Saudi captured in Iraq named Mohammad Qadir Hussein, was a poor, disgruntled individual who had no military training, but who was motivated by an abiding desire to help other Muslims in distress. [3]

The collapse of Iraqi border controls facilitated the entry of un-sponsored insurgents into Iraq, while Iraqi middlemen or facilitators provided logistical support (i.e. food, directions, and weapons and ammunition) once these individuals had gained entry into the country. Un-sponsored foreign infiltrators are then “passed on” to Sunni imams who became their mentors. Many of these foreign infiltrators entered Iraq before the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom. While poorly trained and ill-equipped, a substantial number of them fought doggedly and to the death in some of the battles between Iraqi irregular forces and the coalition advancing from the south. After the end of Operation Iraqi Freedom, some returned home, while others remained and fought in the insurgency. Many of these gravitated towards the more disciplined jihadist insurgents.

## Non-State Actors and Organizations

Foreign insurgents who come in as part of a “package” sent into Iraq by non-state actors are a more formidable force than un-sponsored foreign infiltrators. There is growing evidence that Iraq has begun to attract foreign Islamists and anti-American groups such as al-Qaeda and the Tawhid organization of the elusive and enigmatic Jordanian-Palestinian terrorist, Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi, for whom Iraq is a new and easily accessible battlefield.

Uncertainty regarding the level or depth of al-Qaeda presence in Iraq remains due to a lack of non-politicized intelligence on its activities in that country. Osama bin Laden and his subordinates did not think much of Saddam Hussein and his regime, with evidence showing that the feelings were mutual. In the early days of the war, when there was an influx of

foreign volunteers into Iraq, Hussein apparently warned the Ba’ath party against close links with outsiders, especially religious extremists. [4] A senior Islamist operative (now deceased) allegedly authored a text entitled “The Future of Iraq and the Peninsula After Baghdad’s Fall: The Religious, Military, Political and Economic Future.” The work argues that the fall of the Ba’athist regime was “better for the Islamists than the victory of the Iraqi Ba’athists, because the collapse of Arab Ba’athism means the collapse of the atheist, pan-Arab slogans that swept the Muslim nation... the demise of the Ba’ath government in Iraq heralds the hoisting of the Islamic banner over the debris.” [5] Such fighters were attracted to Iraq following the war precisely in order to fight the U.S. presence in that country for the sake of Islam.

Once in Iraq, “sponsored” jihadists needed to create a logistical infrastructure, as infiltrating heavy weapons and explosives across the borders of Iraq’s neighbors is difficult. [6] For this they needed the help of Iraqis. Mutual suspicion between Sunni Islamists and former regime loyalists, secular-minded nationalists, and tribal elements actively opposing the Coalition does not mean that the latter groups are averse to providing logistical support for the former. Attempts by foreign jihadist organizations to operate in Iraq depend on the resources, protection and concealment provided to their fighters by Iraqis. Unable to enter into Iraq with the resources they need or blend in with the local population, these foreign elements would be lost without support from within Iraq.

## Salafists in Iraq

The importance of the foreign jihadists who adhere to a strict interpretation of Sunni Islam (known properly as Salafism but popularly as Wahhabism) lies in three distinct areas. Firstly, these foreign jihadists have coupled with local Iraqi Salafists – who emerged into the open following the downfall of the Saddam regime – to successfully introduce a cohesive and extreme ideology to the public. While many of these groups, like the Mujahideen al-Salafiyah in Balad, have even reached out to members of the former Feda’yeen Saddam as long as the latter drop their allegiance to Saddam.

Secondly, they have increased the prospects for communal violence by waging a campaign of deliberate and focused attacks against leaders of other Muslim communities, promoters of “moral laxity,” and non-Muslims. In the fall of 2003, Islamists were particularly active in Mosul, where they attacked a nunnery, killed a well-known writer, bombed a popular cinema, and torched four liquor stores. The worst atrocity came with the bombings of Christian churches this summer.

Thirdly, they have been responsible for the suicide bombing campaigns in Iraq between early fall 2003 and summer 2004. August 2003 saw three massive car bombings. Some of the most devastating suicide attacks came in mid-November 2003 against Italians in Nasiriyah and in mid-January 2004 outside a Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) compound in Baghdad. In March 2004, the Shi'a religious celebration of Ashura witnessed multiple suicide bombings which killed hundreds. [7]

However, as of summer 2004, it is increasingly evident that the different agendas and modus operandi of the nationalist Iraqi insurgency and their ostensible jihadist allies have caused considerable tensions between these groups. While they admire the motivation and skills of the foreigners, many mainstream Islamist and tribal insurgents resent an ideological agenda which has resulted in the killing of Iraqis simply for not adhering to a strict religious line. The foreign fighter's apparent blood lust, which has led to indiscriminate attacks and the beheading of abductees, also angers Iraqi nationalists. [8] In early summer 2004, nationalist insurgents in Fallujah were about to assault a group of foreign jihadists based in the Jolan suburb, led by a Saudi with the nom de guerre of Abu Abdullah. Later, insurgent "authorities" in Fallujah – largely made up of former military personnel and Iraqi police and led by clerics – succeeded in evicting a number of non-Iraqi terrorists from the area.

### State Support for the Insurgency

The Bush Administration has accused two of Iraq's neighbors, Syria and Iran, of facilitating or actively encouraging foreign fighters to cross the Iraqi border. The singling out of these two countries, despite the fact that Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey also maintain porous borders with Iraq, reflects the political dynamics at play as the U.S. tries to stabilize the Great Middle East.

Syria and Iran fear the U.S. will succeed in its (unstated) goal of implementing a pro-American "puppet regime" in Baghdad. Such a regime would allow U.S. bases to operate in Iraq, giving U.S. forces the ability to threaten these countries. Both Tehran and Damascus see each other as the next U.S. target for regime change. The logical response is to support anti-US operations in Iraq, thereby ensuring that the hostile Bush Administration remains mired there. However, this is a very risky endeavor on many levels.

Both countries understand that to overtly support anti-US forces in Iraq risks incurring America's wrath. Not long after the end of Operation Iraqi Freedom, warnings from the Bush administration to Syria and Iran not to help the

nascent insurgency were issued from a position of strength. Both Syria and Iran bent over backwards to avoid irritating a U.S. that was itching for a fight. Indeed, there were reports that U.S. Special Operations Units undertook actions across the border into Syria and actually clashed with Syrian border guards. Therefore, the growing U.S. problems in Iraq by fall 2003 must have been a source of considerable satisfaction to both Tehran and Damascus.

While neither could overtly support the insurgency, it is not too far-fetched to assume that they did so covertly or turned a blind eye to pro-insurgent activities conducted by elements within their respective countries. Both Syria and Iran have domestic constituencies that are thoroughly hostile to the U.S., and furthermore, alarmed by the belligerent attitude taken by Washington towards their respective countries. Arab nationalists in Syria, for example, are inclined to lend support to the remnants of the Iraqi Ba'ath party. Meanwhile, Iranian groups like the Revolutionary Guards might be inclined to support Shi'a insurgents such as the Mahdist Army led by Muqtada al-Sadr.

But there are attendant risks. Firstly, neither country wants continued instability on their borders. Secondly, neither country is particularly enamored of the leading ideological elements responsible for the violence in Iraq. As a regime dominated by the minority 'Alawis (thoroughly despised by Sunni extremists), Syria does not want to see the growth of Sunni extremism in Iraq. Nor does secular Damascus wish to see a theocratic Baghdad, despite its sympathy for and traditional alliance with the Shi'as. For its part, Iran is hardly likely to support Sunni extremists or Arab nationalists. Both are antithetical to Tehran's agenda. Instead, Iranians continue to support Shi'a groups that are not fighting the U.S., in the plausible and logical expectation that these parties will play a leading role in Iraqi politics once the U.S. has left Iraq.

So, while the restraints of Middle Eastern realpolitik keep states from openly supporting foreign insurgents against the coalition in Iraq, there are many other factors and organizations that contribute to this continuing and complex problem.

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Notes:

1. Quoted in *The Washington Times*, April 30, 2004.
2. Islamist groups, on the other hand, recruited from among

the growing population of disgruntled Islamists in Jordanian cities such as Ma'an.

3. Personal interviews with the author.

4. *New York Times*, January 14, 2004, p.1.

5. Quoted in *al-Hayat*, December 20, 2003, p.4.

6. Cross-border traffic between Iraq and its neighbors by smugglers and tribes existed even in the best of times when Iraq was able to police its borders. Now even though the borders are not effectively policed, foreign infiltrators are unlikely to come into Iraq on their Sports Utility Vehicles – which outrun the two-wheel drives of the border patrols – laden with large quantities of light weaponry or explosives. Nor do they have to since Iraq is one huge ammunition dump.

7. *The Independent* (London), March 07, 2004.

8. For more see *The Daily Star* (Beirut) July 16, 2004.

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## Shi'ite Insurgency in Yemen: Iranian Intervention or Mountain Revolt?

By Andrew McGregor

In the midst of growing political tensions between Iran and the United States a Shi'ite rebellion in the remote mountains of northwest Yemen has created suspicions that Iran may be attempting to open a new anti-American front to weaken U.S. efforts in the region. Yemen's president, Ali Abdullah Salih, has been a resolute ally of the U.S. in the War on Terrorism, but has used the alliance to reverse a once-promising democratic reform process. After a short truce fierce fighting has resumed, as President Salih sought to eliminate resistance from the radical Shi'ite movement. This new conflict follows similar expeditions in the past few years against well-armed groups of Sunni militants.

### The Zaydi Shi'ites

Yemen's Zaydi Shi'ites are well known for passionate loyalty to their Imams (traditional dual religious/political leaders) but are regarded as moderate in their practice of Islam. With the reported growth of the rabidly anti-Shi'ite al-Qaeda organization in Yemen, it has been suggested that Iran may intervene in support of the Zaydi Shi'a. In the past, Sunni veterans of the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan were used to control any resurgence of the Zaydi Shi'a, from whom the old royal family was drawn. [1] Zaydi Shi'ism is one of three main branches of the Shi'a movement, together with Twelver

Shi'ism and the Isma'ili branch. Unlike the other branches, the Zaydi-s are restricted almost solely to the Yemen area. Their form of Shari'a law follows the Sunni Hanafi school, which aids in their integration with the Yemeni Sunnis.

The Saada uprising has a more traditional character than most of the modern Islamist militant organizations, which are led largely by military veterans and professionals such as doctors and engineers. The mountain revolt is led by a Zaydi religious figure, Hussein al-Houthi, who leads a student movement committed to Islamic reform, the Shabab al-Mu'mineen, "The Young Believers." Al-Houthi was a member of Yemen's parliament from 1993-97. Unconnected to the mainstream of Sunni radicalism, al-Houthi is a fierce opponent of al-Qaeda, which cemented its anti-Shi'ite reputation by participating in the Taliban's massacres of Afghan Shi'ites. Like the Sunni militants, however, al-Houthi's most scathing invective is reserved for America and Israel, whom al-Houthi alleges are conducting an anti-Muslim campaign throughout the Middle East. Al-Houthi has urged his followers to prepare for a U.S. invasion of Yemen. Democracy is viewed as a trick to complete the Zionist domination of the Arab world. Even among the Zaydis, support for al-Houthi is far from universal; while refuting charges of Iranian support for the insurgency, al-Houthi's brother, a member of parliament, called the religious leader a "criminal" and an international embarrassment. [2]

Al-Houthi's insurrection is not aimed at spreading Zaydi Shi'ism, but is rather an expression of dissatisfaction with President Salih's pro-American policies. Al-Houthi describes President Salih as "a tyrant... who wants to please America and Israel, by sacrificing the blood of his own people," [3] while the President describes al-Houthi as "sick and mentally abnormal." [4]

### War in the Mountains

The insurgency began June 18. Since then the government has unleashed the full force of its arsenal of jets, armour and artillery to pound the lightly armed "Believers." On July 23, operations were suspended to allow religious scholars a last chance to cross the lines and convince al-Houthi of the mistakenness of his rebellion. Negotiations with al-Houthi have failed in the past, but with Yemen's existence relying on a delicate balance of tribal allegiances there is usually a preference for negotiated settlement. Many believe that the President's insistence on a military solution derives from the rude reception he received on a visit to the mountains earlier this year.

The campaign against al-Houthi was expected to be quick,

but the Shi'ite fighters have lived up to their warrior reputation, giving fierce resistance to what should have been an overwhelming government force. Government troops have had to struggle up passes similar to the one where a well-equipped column of 10,000 Sadaa-bound Ottoman troops was wiped out by the Zaydis in 1904. The savagery of the fighting and the number of casualties on both sides (300-400 dead so far) has been a shock to many Yemenis. Though the "Young Believers" are only somewhere between 1,000 to 3,000 in number, many Yemenis believe that al-Houthi is only giving voice to opinions widely shared in Yemen.

In urban areas like Sanaa, however, there is some disdain for yet another Mahdist-style movement that will come to a bad end for its superstition-fed adherents. Even Abdul Majid al-Zindani, leader of the radical wing of the Islamist Islah party, has warned against the "serious consequences of extremism and all forms of fanaticism, which are the major reason behind the civilizational decline and backwardness of the Muslim nation". [5] A powerful political figure and a former comrade of bin Laden during the Afghanistan war against the Soviets, al-Zindani has recently been accused of collecting funds for al-Qaeda, only to be strongly defended by President Salih. Like many of Yemen's clerics, al-Zindani called for a Muslim jihad against American and British troops in the early days of last year's Iraq campaign.

The ruling General People's Congress Party has accused Iran of direct support for the Saada uprising as an effort to create a new front to drain U.S. resources in anticipation of American attacks on Iran and the Hizbullah of southern Lebanon. The President has personally avoided naming Iran, but left little doubt to whom he was referring in making charges of interference by 'foreign intelligence agencies'. There have also been suggestions that al-Houthi has received financial assistance from the Shi'ite communities of Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. The insinuation of Iranian involvement came only days after the signing of several new economic agreements between Iran and Yemen and the extension of a 10 million Euro credit by Iran following the conclusion of the 7th meeting of the Yemen-Iran Committee, a forum for bilateral relations.

In Yemen's long civil war of the 1960s, Iran gave financial aid and a small quantity of arms to the Royalist government of the Zaydi Imam, though its contribution was small compared to that of Sunni Saudi Arabia. The Shah's help had less to do with Shi'ite fellowship than with hindering the regional ambitions of Nasser, who had already deployed the United Arab Republic army on the Republican side. The Republicans were themselves dominated by a mainly Zaydi officer corps and most Shi'ite and Sunni tribes were usually

just a bribe away from changing sides. For the most part, the Arab Zaydis of Yemen have continued to evolve in isolation from their Shi'ite brethren in Iran.

Outgoing U.S. ambassador to Yemen Edmond Hall recently expressed satisfaction with Yemen's anti-terrorist efforts while suggesting that conditions in Saada province made it rife for penetration by elements of al-Qaeda. Hall's critics in Yemen accuse the ambassador of running autonomous counter-terrorism operations within Yemen, though both the ambassador and the government insist that their operations are fully coordinated. Hall, the survivor of several assassination attempts, was recently described by a Yemen columnist as "the ambassador who did not give a damn for diplomacy." [6]

#### Alliance with Saudi Arabia

Efforts have been made to cooperate with Saudi forces in securing the poorly defined and largely unpopulated Yemen-Saudi border in order to prevent the infiltration of Islamist militants fleeing Saudi Arabia's own crackdown. Saudi Arabia has also long complained of the traffic in arms from Yemen. The Saudis' construction of a security barrier along the border has outraged opposition groups in Yemen, who compare it to Israel's wall in the West Bank. Official relations between the Saudi kingdom and Yemen have rarely been closer than they are now. In July, Saudi Arabia returned to Yemen over 40,000 square kilometers (mostly in eastern Hadramawt province) in accordance with the border treaty of 2000. On July 24, both nations exchanged 15 suspected terrorists for prosecution. Questions have arisen over just how far the new Saudi-Yemeni cooperation extends. The Saudis denied charges last month from al-Houthi's camp that the Saudi Air Force was involved in a joint Yemen-Saudi bombing campaign that destroyed several villages. The death of numerous Zaydi civilians in air and artillery attacks has brought the attention of Amnesty International, which has asked the Yemen Interior Ministry for an investigation.

#### Conclusion

At the moment there appears to be a movement within some parts of the U.S. administration to identify Iran as a growing threat to U.S. interests, alleging Iranian aid to al-Qaeda before and after the 9/11 attacks. In making 'links' between Iran and the Zaydi insurgency there is a tendency to integrate Shi'ite movements within a vertical command structure (with Tehran at the top) that does not accurately reflect historical, social, linguistic, ethnic and even religious differences between the branches of Shi'ite Islam.

Iran weathered similar political storms during the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq with surprising patience, perhaps expecting the U.S. to exhaust itself before it can strike Iran. Despite the encouragement of Israel, the U.S. is unlikely in the short term to take military measures against Iran, a much larger and formidable adversary than Iraq. The usefulness of the Saada rebellion as an Iranian counter-strategy is questionable; the uprising is not large enough to influence the balance of power in the region or to draw away significant American resources in the way a general Sunni rising would. The attractions of militancy to a traditionally conservative and moderate community should sound a warning that the Salih government may be leading Yemen into a period of renewed civil conflict that may easily spill into the international arena.

A more important threat remains from Yemen's Sunni extremists. On July 1, the Abu Hafis al-Masri Brigade threatened to drag the United States into 'a third quagmire' in Yemen (after Afghanistan and Iraq) with the cooperation of local Islamist groups. Yemen's Sunni radicals played a prominent role in the growth of al-Qaeda; the region may continue to provide an important source of manpower for international terrorist operations. Homegrown militant groups like the Islamic Army of Aden also continue to provide military challenges to the Salih government. With U.S. forces unexpectedly overextended in Iraq, the U.S. has so far avoided a large-scale military commitment in Yemen, preferring to aid the Yemen regime in its own local war against Islamist extremism.

Yemen's experiment with democracy is withering as Salih, president since 1978, attempts to create dynastic rule at the head of a one-party state. Lately Salih has attempted to reverse the process of integrating Islamists into the government. The pro-US position of the President (and its offer of troops for service in Iraq) is hardly a representation of popular sentiment in Yemen. Salih's control of Yemen will be sorely tested in the days ahead as the government simultaneously tries suspects in the 2000 bombing of the USS Cole and the 2002 attack on the French tanker Limburg.

Salih has established a pattern of playing off Islamists against Socialists, with the intention of eliminating both as potential opponents of the GPC. While Salih grooms his son as his successor, Yemen threatens to become a replica of the hereditary Ba'athist presidencies of Iraq and Syria. The stifling of democracy and the alienation of Islamists from the political process are contributing factors to the radicalization of Yemen's Sunni majority. With new challenges from a revival of Southern separatism and the unexpected insurgency in the Zaydi heartland, Yemen has

become a new Middle Eastern tinderbox.

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Notes

1. The Zaydi Imams ruled Yemen from the ninth century until 1962, with interruptions. The Shi'a represent roughly 40% of Yemen's 20 million people.
2. John R Bradley: 'A warning from Yemen, cradle of the Arab world', *Daily Star* (Beirut), July 13, 2004
3. 'Yemeni preacher speaks out against Salih', Agence France Press, July 22, 2004
4. 'Yemeni President: al-Houthi is an ill man, mentally abnormal', Arab News, July 9, 2004, <http://arabicnews.com>
5. Mohammed al-Qadhi: 'Islah warns of Sa'ada events consequences: Criticism of U.S. accusations against al-Zindani', *Yemen Times*, July 23, 2004
6. Hassan al-Zaidi: 'Yemen bids farewell to Ambassador Hall', *Yemen Times*, July 26-28, 2004

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## Why Extremism is on the Rise in Uzbekistan

By Igor Rotar

The July 30 attacks on the Prosecutor General's Office, the U.S. Embassy, and the Israeli Embassy in Tashkent demonstrate the continued terrorist presence in the republic of Uzbekistan. These forces appear to be directing their efforts not only against the regime of Islam Karimov, but also the entire Western world. At the time of the explosion, this Jamestown correspondent was at the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) office, located approximately 200 meters from the Israeli embassy. He can testify that the explosion was so powerful that the windows in the IREX office were nearly shattered. Uzbek law enforcement officials managed to completely seal off the perimeter of the Israeli embassy within ten minutes of the explosion. Arriving at the scene, one witnessed police officers outfitted with combat helmets, body armor and automatic assault weapons lining the streets. Tashkent resident Iskander Khamidov described the explosion in this way: "Everything took place literally within seconds. The loud explosion was heard and then I saw the parts of human flesh strewn around the sidewalk."

Several days later, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) took responsibility for the attacks with the following message on an Islamist website: "The group of young

Muslims from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan carried out operations against the embassies of the United States and Israel as well the Prosecutor General's Office, which has recently transferred the criminal cases of several brothers from this group to the court." [1] The U.S. Department of State designated the IMU a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 2000, following attempted coups by the IMU against the Karimov government during the summers of 1999 and 2000. However, following U.S.-led operations in Afghanistan, the IMU practically ceased its activities. At that time, some suggested that the American Air Force had destroyed IMU bases located on territories controlled by the Taliban, thereby severely curtailing its operational capabilities.

Just four days before this latest attack, the Supreme Court of Uzbekistan had commenced the trial of several individuals charged with organizing a series of bombings which took dozens of lives in March-April 2004. The defendants pled guilty at the first court hearing and one by one began to make statements about their ties with extremist organizations, including al-Qaeda, the IMU, and Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT).

22 year-old Farkhod Kazakbaev admitted that the Zhamoat (Society) – the network of extremist groups allegedly operating in Uzbekistan – has ties with both al-Qaeda and HT. According to Kazakbaev, the Uzbek national Nasriddin Jalalov, said to be personally subordinate to the Taliban leader Mullah Omar, heads this network. However, the authenticity of the defendants' confessions have been questioned. During an interview, Human Rights Watch's (HRW) Tashkent representative, Alison Gill, expressed her skepticism: "We are concerned about the way this trial is unfolding. For instance, the defendants' lawyers are very passive. One is left with the impression that they are appointed for formal reasons in order to create the impression of a democratic trial."

One day after the terrorist attacks, Uzbek President Islam Karimov laid blame for the explosions on HT. In a televised address to the nation on July 31, President Karimov stated, "From the outset there were rumors that these explosions were committed by the IMU. If the IMU takes responsibility for yesterday's explosions, then the impression is formed as if the Hizb ut-Tahrir is innocent. However, this is precisely what they want us to believe." Such an instantaneous accusation evokes suspicion. Even though HT is famous for its explicitly anti-Western and anti-Semitic statements (for instance, HT's proclamations refer to Karimov as a "Jewish Kafir"), the organization repeatedly emphasizes its commitment to the creation of the Caliphate through peaceful means only. On August 1, the Internet site of the Muslim Community of Great Britain featured an official press release

by the Islamist party Hizb ut-Tahrir. Signed by Imran Vahid, an HT representative in London, the letter states that HT is well-known as an Islamic political party and in its struggle it chooses only non-violent means for advancing its political agenda. Vahid rejected accusations of HT involvement in the July 30 attacks in Tashkent. He further noted that recent events in Tashkent have been used by Uzbek authorities to repress the activities of all independent Muslims under the guise of the war against "international terrorism." [3]

In essence, many Uzbek human rights advocates agree with this view. Chairman of the prominent Uzbek human rights organization Society for Human Rights in Uzbekistan, Talib Yakubov, stated, "Both the explosions in late March and early April were committed by the Uzbek authorities in order to justify further repressions against Muslims. At the same time, the July explosions are intended to convince Western public opinion. By using this provocation, Karimov is trying to convince the West that the repression against Uzbek Muslims is justified." Though such an opinion has yet to be supported with any evidence, it should be noted that the recent attacks did elicit an unexpected reaction among ordinary Uzbeks. The majority of Tashkent residents interviewed for this article were inclined to justify the actions of the terrorists. Such public resentment against the government can be explained to a large extent by the appalling economic conditions that the majority of Uzbeks face and widespread corruption throughout the government.

The living standard in Uzbekistan is one of the lowest of all the CIS. Statistical data about the salary distribution in Uzbekistan is highly classified, but it is known that the official minimal wage is equal to 5,540 Uzbek Soms (\$5.50) per diem. However, according to estimates by independent experts, the average salary in the republic is no more than \$20 per month. In rural areas it is not infrequent for the average family income to be lower than \$10 per month. Crowds of gloomy, unshaven men with knapsacks squat along the road that encircles the capital of Uzbekistan. For the daily cost of \$1 or \$2, it is possible to hire these men who have come from provinces to earn money.

Given the situation, it is not uncommon to hear statements sympathetic towards Islamists even from the most secular individuals. "If they come to power, at least they won't steal and take bribes," was a frequently comment. Considering the present state of affairs, an increasing portion of the population is becoming convinced that any methods for ousting the present regime are justified. Many Tashkent residents repeatedly stated, "It is simply impossible to carry on, we are tired and we are ready for anything."

At the same time, Uzbek Islamists skillfully exploit the current economic crisis, and Karimov's support for Washington's policies, in their propaganda activities. The author repeatedly heard from religious Uzbeks that "Western democracy turned out to [consist of] poverty and mass corruption." Interviewees did not even suspect that there is very little in common between the Western model of development and the current Uzbek regime. Military operations by the U.S. and its allies also elicited very negative reactions among the religious parts of Uzbek society. In conversations, Uzbek Islamists emphasize that of all Central Asian leaders, only Karimov openly supported the U.S.-led military operation in Iraq in exchange for Washington's support of the law enforcement structures in Uzbekistan. It is noteworthy that about two months ago, a group of prominent Uzbek human rights organizations sent a letter to the Bush administration requesting the cessation of financial assistance to Tashkent until the human rights situation in the republic improves. The letter also stated that support for the present Uzbek regime might create an unfavorable image of Washington in the population.

The recent bombings have had little impact on daily life in Tashkent. In contrast with the March-April 2004 terrorist acts, which generated a wave of repressions against practicing Muslims, thus far, no new mass arrests have been registered in Uzbekistan. Measures implemented by the authorities have been mostly of a cosmetic character. For instance, the road to the presidential residence outside of Tashkent is blocked off. There are more police patrols in the streets of the Uzbek capital and armed military personnel conduct thorough examinations of all vehicles entering the city. All entrances to expensive hotels have been equipped with metal detectors. But because the root causes of terrorism still have not been eradicated, it is hard to guarantee that the tragedy of July 30 will not be repeated.

*Igor Rotar is Central Asia correspondent for Forum 18 News Service.*

Notes:

1. Vedomosti, August 2, 2004
2. ITAR-TASS, August 1, 2004
3. <http://www.1294.org/press>, August 1, 2004

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## Hizb ut-Tahrir in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan: A Comparative Analysis

By Stephen Schwartz

New bombings at the gates of the U.S. and Israeli embassies in Tashkent on July 30, and an apparently-aborted political trial in the capital of Uzbekistan, have drawn renewed attention to the specter of Islamist extremism in Central Asia. Three Uzbek citizens were killed in the embassy attacks, which like the terrorist incidents in March, seemed to have been the work of freelance, amateur jihadists.

On August 2, a Tashkent judge abruptly suspended the trial of 15 people allegedly responsible for the March events. The proceeding had already featured a series of confessions in which the accused, including two women, described a terrorist network called Jama'at, or Assembly, with purported links to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), an alleged ally of al-Qaeda, and to the Pan-Islamic party, Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT).

As in past cases, representatives of HT denied and ridiculed the charges, arguing that they do not engage in political violence, but intend only to instruct and convince Muslims of the need to establish a *Khilafah* or Caliphate in Central Asia and beyond. At the same time, however, HT propaganda calls for the removal of the existing governments in the region and expulsion of local Jewish communities. In Uzbekistan, on which it concentrates most of its polemical fire, HT accuses the country's authoritarian president, Islam Karimov, of being a Jew.

Karimov has also tentatively blamed HT for the July 30 bombings, and Tashkent authorities have reportedly arrested up to 85 more people in their aftermath. That approach was confirmed when Karimov claimed on Uzbek television, "The same group carried out the March explosions as yesterday's [July 30] explosions and they base their ideas on Hizb ut-Tahrir's teaching ... Hizb ut-Tahrir made the biggest contribution to that terror."

Just before the opening of the Tashkent trial the Uzbek regime communicated to Western sources that it intended to prove a case against HT, although the investigation was incomplete.

While the trial of the 15 was in progress, however, Uzbekistan's giant neighbor, Kazakhstan, was shocked

by testimony claiming that several of the defendants had received military training at a terrorist camp on Kazakh soil. Kazakh officials and publicists first denied the possibility of such a camp's existence on their territory, despite Kazakhstan being a vast country with a population of only 15 million people. Some accused the Uzbeks of aggravating fear of Islamic extremism in the region and of suggesting that the regime of Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev cannot maintain security within its borders.

Certain defendants apparently had spent time in the Shimkent region of Kazakhstan, which has a considerable Uzbek community. Kazakh officials then said they had not found any terrorists operating in the southern region of their country, but cannot deny the possibility that some might have slipped over the porous border, especially given the predominance of Uzbeks on both sides of the frontier.

In a visit to Kazakhstan at the end of June, the author discussed HT and related issues with Kazakh officials and experts. An encounter with Dr. Emmanuel Karagiannis, assistant professor in the department of political science at the state-sponsored Kazakh Institute of Management, Economics and Strategic Research in Almaty, focused exclusively on HT, on which Karagiannis has conducted extensive research. He argued that HT in Central Asia is essentially an Uzbek phenomenon, particularly in southern Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, which have significant Uzbek minorities, as well as in Uzbekistan itself.

Unlike most foreign observers of HT, who concentrate on its appeal to the economically disadvantaged Muslim masses in former Soviet countries, Karagiannis detected a pronounced ethnic element in its agitation. "Uzbeks outside Uzbekistan feel they are victims of discrimination," he said. "For Uzbeks outside Uzbekistan, HT and the Wahhabi movement are expressions of Uzbek identity."

The so-called "Uzbek" characteristics of HT activities were tentatively expressed in an interview the author conducted at the end of 2003, in the Ferghana Valley town of Margilon with Saidakbar Oppokhodjayev, aged 35, a former HT cadre who had defected from the group and accepted an amnesty from the Karimov government.

Oppokhodjayev fit the classic HT profile: an intense "seeker" who joined the group to gain a better education in Islam. He said he had been recruited to HT by an Uzbek who offered lessons in Islam; when the course of instruction turned to politics, it focused exclusively on Uzbekistan under Karimov, rather than a more general discussion of the Khilafah. Oppokhodjayev said all of the HT adherents in

Margilon were Uzbeks, and that no Arabs had participated in the group.

The phenomenon of HT penetration of the Uzbek population in southern Kazakhstan was underscored by Dr. Dosym Satpayev, of the Assessment Risks Group, who has also worked as a correspondent for the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR). Satpayev said that HT infiltration had been continuous over the past five years, aimed at Kazakhs as well as Uzbeks in the mixed border region.

Satpayev also made it clear that the same frontier is an attractive area for other Islamists, noting a recent case of Kazakh suppression of an alleged Muslim Brotherhood cell implanted in southern Kazakhstan.

In general terms, the most interesting aspect of HT is the marked resemblance between its vocabulary and argumentation and the rhetoric of Soviet Communism. It denounces capitalism in identical terms, and attacks the United States for hegemonism in the wake of the Soviet collapse, as if nostalgic for the former system. Its appeal in Central Asia could be reducible to a longing for the stable, universalist characteristics of the Khilafah replacing the chaos that followed the breakdown of the Soviet empire.

It is important to stress here that the history of HT in Uzbekistan and amongst Uzbeks in general must be separated from that of the IMU, a militant group allegedly aligned with al-Qaeda, if only because the IMU based its strategy against Uzbekistan on military action from outside the country, utilizing bases in Afghanistan and Tajikistan. The IMU never carried out a sustained campaign inside Uzbek territory, and in the wake of the collapse of the Taliban its resurgence seems unlikely. Moreover, despite the relentless propaganda of the Uzbek government, there is no reliable evidence pointing towards any involvement of HT in terrorism and political violence whether in Uzbekistan or anywhere else in Central Asia.

When comparing Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, the greater susceptibility of the former to the appeal of HT, is mainly premised on economic issues, particularly to the slow transition of the Uzbek economy to capitalism. In contrast to Tashkent, and its sluggish economic life, the first thing that is noticeable in Almaty, is the lack of inflated currency, an unmistakable feature of a rise in prosperity and economic stability. Indeed post-Soviet Kazakhstan has succeeded, much more so than Uzbekistan, in setting up a market economy.

Another factor behind the rise of HT in Uzbekistan stemmed

from the early, clumsy security measures adopted by the Karimov regime. By labeling any form of religiously-inspired dissent as “Wahhabism” the Uzbek regime may have inadvertently bolstered the position of HT and other radical Islamic organizations. This is because many religiously inspired activists flocked to radical organizations to better confront the Karimov regime. Moreover, by trying to co-opt strands of Sufi Islam into its state ideology the Karimov regime adopted a traditional (as opposed to radical and political) Islamic posture in an attempt to undercut the appeal of HT. Judging by the meteoric rise of HT in Uzbekistan, this policy has all but backfired.

This contrasts sharply to events in Kazakhstan where the government never attempted to fight the Islamists by adopting traditional Islamic positions. While Uzbekistan has spent large sums on the rehabilitation of Islamic architecture, including Sufi shrines, such efforts have a much lower priority in Kazakhstan, even though the country houses the Hojja Yasawi tomb complex, the most important Sufi site in Central Asia. One cannot help but surmise that the Karimov government in Tashkent seeks to establish a kind of “state Sufism” as a replacement for the state socialism that was the ideological underpinning for the Soviet order, and that Karimov’s rage at HT may be caused by resentment of a rival ideological claimant to the post-Communist succession.

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