

TERRORISM FOCUS

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IN THIS ISSUE:

* BRIEFS.....	1
* Jihadi Tutorial in Urban Terrorism and the Kidnapping of Americans.....	2
* Iran’s Missile Tests and the New Strategy of the Revolutionary Guard.....	4
* Moroccan Crackdown on Salafiya Jihadiya Recruitment of Fighters for Iraq.....	5
* Was Alleged al-Qaeda Attack a Failed Attempt to Occupy the U.S. Consulate in Istanbul?.....	6



AL-QAEDA’S OPERATIONAL COMMANDER IN AFGHANISTAN PROMISES EXPANSION OF WAR INTO NORTHERN PROVINCES

Pakistan’s Geo-TV has released a video interview with al-Qaeda’s operational commander in Afghanistan, the Egyptian militant Mustafa Abu al-Yazid (a.k.a. Shaykh Sa’id). With a rifle by his side, Abu al-Yazid gave the Arabic-language interview from an undisclosed location in Khost, across the border from Pakistan’s Waziristan tribal agency (Geo-TV, July 22).

A veteran jihadi, Abu al-Yazid was imprisoned along with Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri in Egypt following the assassination of Anwar Sadat in 1981. After joining up with Bin Laden in Pakistan in the early 1990s, Abu al-Yazid became al-Qaeda’s financial manager during Bin Laden’s stay in the Sudan. He later aided in the financing of the 9/11 attacks despite his reported opposition to the operation.

Abu al-Yazid confirmed al-Qaeda’s responsibility for the 9/11 attacks and the 1998 embassy attacks in east Africa, but denied an al-Qaeda role in last year’s mosque bombings in Pakistan. He described the June 2 bombing of the Danish embassy in Islamabad that killed six Pakistanis as an al-Qaeda operation carried out by a young militant from Mecca who was enraged by the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad published in Denmark: “We are proud of that attack, and I congratulated my colleagues for conducting it successfully.”

Abu al-Yazid also called for more Pakistanis to join the al-Qaeda/Taliban struggle: “In fact it is obligatory for them to render this help and is a responsibility that is imposed by religion. It is not only obligatory for

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residents of the tribal regions but all of Pakistan.” The Egyptian militant criticized Pakistan’s President Pervez Musharraf for authorizing the arrest of Arab mujahideen and their transfer to American hands: “Pervez Musharraf and his government have committed crimes for which there are no examples in the entire world... This is an ugly spot on Pakistan’s history which cannot be forgotten until doomsday.”

The Egyptian commander confirmed al-Qaeda is in the process of expanding its operations into north Afghanistan and promised that the group would free Afghanistan from foreign occupation “very soon.” Earlier this month Abu al-Yazid issued a statement swearing revenge for the death of al-Qaeda field commander Abdallah Muhammad al-Abid in a firefight with Coalition forces in Afghanistan (Pajhwok Afghan News, July 7).

TERRORIST FUNDING NETWORK RESTORED FOR MUSLIM CONVERT MOVEMENT IN THE PHILIPPINES

According to the antiterrorism branch of the Philippine National Police, a new funding network has been created to support the terrorist activities of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and the lesser-known Rajah Sulaiman Movement (RSM), a dangerous group of Filipino natives who abandoned Christianity for radical Islam after working in the Middle East. The new financing network, allegedly run by Saudi national Abdulrahman Qaussamulah, replaces an earlier network run by Osama Bin Laden’s brother-in-law Muhammad Jamal Khalifa, which was disrupted by a raid on the Islamic Information Center in Manila in 2005 (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* [Makati City], July 14).

The movement is named for Rajah Sulaiman Mahmud, the last Muslim ruler of Manila, who fell battling Spanish invaders in 1571. The RSM is dedicated to the “re-Islamization” of the northern Philippines (AFP, December 21, 2005). The converts to Islam work closely with the Abu Sayyaf Group and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), an Indonesian-based terrorist group with close ties to al-Qaeda. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), currently in negotiations with the government, denies accusations that it has provided refuge for RSM operatives (*Mindanao Examiner*, December 11, 2006). Abu Sayyaf has also made efforts to recruit Christians from their operational area in Basilan Island and Zamboanga City (AFP, September 21, 2005). A movement known as Balik Islam is dedicated to converting Filipino Christians to Islam.

Seven members of the RSM, including current leader Ruben Pestano Lavilla Jr., were placed on the U.S. list

of “Specially Designated Global Terrorists” in June (U.S. Treasury Department, HP-1030, June 16). The document cited RSM involvement in the February 2004 Manila ferry bombing that killed 116 people and the February 2005 Valentine’s Day bombing in Makati City that killed four people and wounded over 100.

Lavilla replaced previous RSM commander Feliciano de los Reyes (a.k.a. Ustadz Abubakr), who was arrested in December 2006. Ricardo Ayeras (a.k.a. Abdul Karim), an important founding member of the RSM, was captured in August 2007. Ayeras later claimed to be a Catholic who was tortured into a confession at Camp Crame, the Quezon City headquarters of the Philippine National Police. RSM founder Hilarion del Rosario (a.k.a. Ahmed Santos) was arrested in Zamboanga City in October 2005 while stockpiling 600 kilograms of explosives for an alleged plot to bomb the U.S. embassy in Manila.

Many RSM members are believed to come from affluent families with connections abroad (AFP, January 23, 2007). Many speak Arabic and English as well as local languages and are able to mix freely in Manila and other major Filipino urban centers which are predominately Christian. An influential Filipino broadcaster and an audio consultant who worked with police were responsible for bailing out Dawud Santos (brother of RSM leader Ahmed Santos) in 2005 after he was arrested with 10 sacks of ammonium nitrate in his possession. The release reportedly left President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo infuriated (*Remate* [Manila], November 2, 2005).

Jihadi Tutorial in Urban Terrorism and the Kidnapping of Americans

Recent postings in a jihadi internet forum give instructions on how to kidnap Americans and conduct urban terror operations. A posting entitled “The preferred rules of the art of kidnapping Americans” is an in-depth training lesson directed at the conduct of successful kidnappings (al-ekhlaas.net, July 7). In the same context, another posting entitled “Clandestine work inside the city” discussed urban terror training tactics (al-ekhlaas.net, July 7).

A forum participant, nicknamed Abu Hajar Abdul Aziz al-Moqrin, commences his first posting by explaining the definition of security operations against the enemy in depth, the significance of such operations and the different types of these operations. The scope of jihadi operations range from basic security activities to selective

targeting and mass casualty attacks.

In the security operations, jihadis are to attack political figures without claiming responsibility whenever it is deemed necessary to liquidate certain harmful anti-jihad figures. Secondly, jihadi security operations are to be attempted whenever a military attack is impractical. Thirdly, terror attacks are directed against economic targets and enemy facilities. Al-Moqrin elaborates on the tactics jihadis must implement depending on battlefield circumstances, such as raids and ambushes. Preparation for a terror raid or ambush involves target selection, casing, planning, preparing gear, setting a date and selecting the right execution elements. Al-Moqrin explains the importance of casing and surveillance in these operations and elucidates the techniques required for casing and surveillance and the temporary and permanent covers needed for an operation.

On the subject of kidnapping, al-Moqrin says the objective of kidnapping important enemy personnel (such as high ranking officers, aviation officials or diplomats) includes forcing the enemy to acquiesce to demands to release imprisoned fellow jihadis, collecting intelligence from the kidnapped, capturing equipment and documents useful in future jihad operations, raising money through ransoms and the demoralization of the enemy. Prior to execution, the jihadis must collect sufficient intelligence on the target through surveillance. Factors in target selection include:

- Easy access
- The target is a mature male
- The target is isolated from security protection details
- The target is physically weak and easy to subdue
- The target does not maintain vigilance

Kidnapping cells must be equipped with silenced weapons, anesthetic injections, wires, a device to deliver electric shocks, tape, blindfolds and three vehicles—two for reconnaissance and one to transport the target. The victim is to be held in an isolated place with multiple entrances and exits and must be large enough to bury the victim in case the victim is executed.

Al-Moqrin's training lesson is very thorough, covering many small details. The lesson ends by emphasizing discretion,

saying the possibility of detecting and uncovering the cell is 3 percent during preparation, 2 percent during execution and 95 percent after execution.

In another posting in the same forum, entitled "Clandestine work inside the city," al-Moqrin says a four-member jihadi cell should be properly trained in urban terror warfare before activation. Cell members should be locals working under suitable covers and carrying the necessary identity documents. Living expenses are higher in some cities than others; therefore the cell has to be properly funded. Jihadis must learn from past mistakes and operate on a need-to-know basis. The cell that collects information on a target must not know the purpose of the collected information and the cell that secures weapons and equipment must not know the target or the time of execution. Therefore, the urban cell has to have a commanding unit, an intelligence unit, a logistics unit and an execution unit. The units are to communicate indirectly through using the dead letter box technique. Types of jihadi operations in the city include assassinations, kidnappings, vandalism and raids to release imprisoned jihadis.

Al-Moqrin warns jihadis not to attack religious figures because it harms the jihadi cause. An exception is made for cases of great necessity, such as the case of Rabbi Meir Kahane, who was killed in 1990 "for cursing the Prophet Muhammad." Instead, urban jihad cells should seek economic targets, such as Jewish investments in Muslim countries, international companies, international economic experts, exports from "Crusader countries" and raw materials being "stolen from Muslim countries by the enemies," with al-Moqrin calling for attacks on oil wells, oil pipeline and oil tankers.

The human target-list, according to al-Moqrin, should be prioritized as follows:

1. Jews: Jews from Israel and the United States have priority over Jews from the UK and France
2. Christians, especially those from the United States, the UK, Spain, Australia, Canada and Italy
3. Apostates, particularly Muslim leaders who keep close ties with Jewish and "Christian governments," such as Egyptian President Husni Mubarak and the leaders of the Gulf States
4. Secular individuals, including spies and security officials who protect Jews and Christians

Postings of this type demonstrate the professional knowledge of some jihadis in security and intelligence matters. Jihadis are constantly exchanging tactical knowledge to perfect their terror techniques, hoping to succeed in hitting hard targets rather than the soft targets they have attacked so far.

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Iran's Missile Tests and the New Strategy of the Revolutionary Guard

Iran's latest tests of the most advanced type of Shahab-3 (Meteor-3) medium-range ballistic missile, with a reported range of 2,000 kilometers, hint at Tehran's readiness to fight back if Israel or the United States attacks its controversial nuclear program. The first series of missiles was tested on July 9 as part of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) Payambar-e Azam III (Great Prophet III) war games. This test was followed by another show case on July 11, involving three sea-to-surface missiles capable of reaching Israel (*Etelaat*, July 12).

According to a major commander in the IRGC, Mohammad Hejazi, the advanced Shahab missiles were tested in the northern part of the Persian Gulf—near Bushehr Province—and the eastern Strait of Hormuz highlighting the significance of the Persian Gulf territories in the case of a military confrontation (*Etemad Meli*, July 14). The medium range missiles were hailed by the Iranian state as the fastest and most precise weapons in the hands of the IRGC, with the primary aim of targeting U.S. bases in the Persian Gulf (*Etemad Meli*, July 12). According to Rear Admiral Morteza Safari, commander of the IRGC naval forces, a large number of Iranian missile and naval units are ready at any time to begin operations in the Strait of Hormuz (Fars News Agency, July 9).

Despite news of a planned U.S. war game in the Persian Gulf that would include a number of Arab nations, the IRGC described the missile tests as an effective way to curtail U.S. ambitions as a demonstration of Iran's growing stature as a military power in the region (*Etemad*, July 9; *Etemad Meli*, July 14). Just days before the first military display, Mohammad Ali Jafari, the IRGC commander-in-chief, asserted that any military attack by Israel or the United States would be considered an act of war and that the Guard has made preparations to strike back with the full force of the country's military might (*Iran Daily*, July 5;

Jame Jam, July 9). Immediately following the first phase of the war games, General Hussein Salami, commander of the IRGC air force, described the tested missiles as merely a fraction of the IRGC's missile force, designed with enhanced precision to strike at various U.S. bases in Iraq and the Persian Gulf: "Our missiles are ready to be fired at any time and anywhere. We were able to reduce the weight of the missiles, and this provides them with great precision. Our response will be swift. We want to tell our enemies that we are fully prepared, that we have a deterrent force, and that we are watching the targets of the enemy" (*Iran Daily*, July 10; Al-Alam TV, July 9).

The above statements appeared following the recent restructure of the Guard's higher command units in the province of Golestan, along with the appointments of Mohammad Hejazi as the head of the Thurallah Force, Hussein Hamedani as the vice-commander of the IRGC's Basij Corps and Brigadier-General Mohammad Jafar Assadi as the commander of the IRGC's ground force. All are considered major hardline figures in the Guard's upper echelons (*Kayhan*, July 10; *Etemad Meli*, July 14; *Iran Daily*, July 19).

The change in the military command structure may only be a routine operational procedure, but it also reflects the Guard's new organizational strategy in response to the U.N. Security Council's current efforts to isolate Iran over its nuclear program and, more importantly, public rumors of a U.S. (or Israeli) attack on the country's nuclear facilities before the end of the Bush administration (Field observation, Tehran, June 4 to July 15).

To a large degree, the strategy behind the latest war games reveals Iran's readiness to counter any U.S. military intervention through conventional means of warfare, mostly concentrated in the Persian Gulf region where U.S. forces are believed to be vulnerable to Iranian surface-to-sea missile attacks (*Iran Daily*, July 9). The strategy is likely tied to Iran's declining influence in southern Iraq, as the Mahdi Army appears to have gone underground after the success of the Basra offensive led by the Maliki government and supported by U.S. forces. With the growing power of the Maliki government in the south and the relative success of the surge in Baghdad and Iraq's western provinces, the Guard may now consider the strategy of irregular warfare in Iraq obsolete in light of Tehran's recent diplomatic efforts in support for the Baghdad government.

The Guard's position is built on its own perception of the Iranian state as one of the region's historic powers,

a conviction that a technologically advanced military program is an essential feature of state power, and a sense that U.S. influence in the region is waning, largely due to difficulties in maintaining stability in Afghanistan and Iraq. As it obtains a high-tech weapons supply, Tehran has a growing confidence in its conventional warfare capabilities that is leading it from its usual strategic reliance on irregular methods of warfare. By moving away from the Mahdi Army due to changing currents in Iraqi politics, the IRGC views conventional warfare as a more reliable means of responding to attacks by Israel or the United States. As a result, even a successful air campaign against Iran's nuclear sites could easily escalate as Iran responds with conventional forces in the Persian Gulf, causing serious harm to regional political stability and an already vulnerable global economy.

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Moroccan Crackdown on Salafiya Jihadiya Recruitment of Fighters for Iraq

For the third time this year, Morocco has announced the dismantling of a terrorist group. The latest operation occurred only a few months after the complex Belliraj affair in February and the arrest of a cell in May suspected of plotting attacks in Morocco and Belgium (see *Terrorism Focus*, March 4; June 10). These multiple arrests underscore the importance of the jihadi threat in Morocco but, like the two previous operations, the latest crackdown raises many questions about the nature of the threat.

Police announced the arrest of 35 alleged recruiters for al-Qaeda operations in Morocco, Iraq and Algeria on July 2. According to the police, the recruiters formed an organized network active across the entire country. The arrests took place in Tangiers, Larache, Oujda, Tetouan, Rabat, Khouribga and Fes (AFP, July 2).

The network, which had been under surveillance for several months, was finally dismantled earlier this month, as there were signs of an imminent attack. The local cells were apparently at the stage of pinpointing targets and the group leaders were waiting for the green light from al-Qaeda's core leadership in order to launch bombing operations, according to security sources (Assabah, July 4). If this claim is confirmed, it would indicate that the planned operation was intended to be very significant.

In a recent interview, Abdelhak Bassou, head of Morocco's Renseignements Généraux, the domestic intelligence agency, said that 11 terrorists arrested in May were preparing attacks planned for this summer against tourist hotels in Morocco. Bassou did not specify whether the cells dismantled in May and July were related. However, he suggested that they were carrying out similar activities—recruiting for international jihad and plotting domestic attacks (AP, July 11).

Local cells dismantled this month across Morocco were only recently activated. New cells have also been created, including those in towns that had been untouched by extremism so far, such as El Hajeb and Taourirt. While several members of the network—including the alleged leader, known by his nom de guerre, Abu Makhlouf—traveled across the country to recruit volunteers, returnees from Iraq were charged with training the recruits according to security sources (Assabah, July 4). Although more information is still needed in this case, the central role played by Iraqi veterans in the creation and training of Moroccan cells should serve as a reminder of the danger constituted by former Iraqi fighters returning to their home countries or leaving for other destinations, following a similar pattern to the Afghan veterans.

Although a wave of returnees is observed, the export of Moroccan jihadis continues. Indeed, most individuals recruited by the Abu Makhlouf network—around 30 jihadi candidates—were sent to Iraq. This represents only a fraction of the Moroccan fighters in Iraq. The data from Moroccan security services indicate that 16 other cells—previously dismantled—had managed to send more than 130 volunteers within the space of three years (Elaph, June 18). Considering that at least 15 more cells have been dismantled, some cells are still under surveillance, some cells are unknown to the police and some individuals travel by themselves, the number of Moroccan fighters in Iraq is probably much higher than official estimates.

A security source revealed to Elaph the detailed itinerary of Moroccan jihadis joining the Iraqi insurgency. First, they board an aircraft to Istanbul, Turkey. From the airport, they take a cab to a travelers' station where they buy a bus ticket to Damascus, Syria. Once arrived, volunteers wait at a hotel for a smuggler, who is paid around \$15,000 cash per trip (Elaph, June 18).

The Abu Makhlouf network was also responsible for recruiting volunteers to join al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Three individuals were allegedly sent to Algeria. There are also indications that Abu

Makhlouf personally traveled to southern Algeria, Mali and Mauritania in order to establish contacts with AQIM leadership (Assabah, July 4).

According to the police, the recently dismantled cells were part of the Salafiya Jihadiya, a Morocco-based Salafist movement. Moroccan authorities blamed this group for the 2003 Casablanca bombings. The Salafiya Jihadiya was also allegedly involved in the 2004 Madrid bombings and was accused of plotting an attack against U.S. Navy ships in the straits of Gibraltar in 2002.

The Salafiya Jihadiya is a particularly understudied and obscure jihadi organization. Its mere existence is challenged by some individuals who accuse the government of using one convenient label for all terrorist activities in Morocco in order to blame international Salafism for domestic terrorism and avoid looking at internal problems, such as low education, poverty and ill-planned urbanization. Most of the suicide bombers of the 2003 attacks came from Morocco's slums (see *Terrorism Monitor*, May 19, 2005).

There is nevertheless a jihadi current specific to Morocco which can be defined as the Salafiya Jihadiya ideology. It finds its roots in the 1980s, when Moroccan King Hassan II allowed Saudi Arabia to spread Wahhabism in order to counter political Islam in Morocco. As a result, a new generation of radical preachers was schooled in Saudi Arabia, including Omar al-Haddouci, Hassan Kettani, Ahmed al-Raffiki, Abdelkarim Chadli and Muhammad Fizazi, all considered key ideologues of the Salafiya Jihadiya. After the 1991 Gulf War, however, these radical preachers distanced themselves from the Saudi regime which had helped the U.S. invasion and started criticizing the Moroccan monarchy.

Ideologically, the Salafiya Jihadiya is inspired by the writings and speeches of Sayyid Qutb, Omar Abd al-Rahman, Abu Qatada and Osama Bin Laden. The resulting doctrine is a radical version of Salafism that advocates the overthrow of the monarchy through the use of violence. The Salafiya Jihadiya rejects democracy and accuses the Moroccan regime of apostasy. The Salafiya Jihadiya claims that local action against Muslim apostates is more important than the war against the "infidels."

In the 1990s, Afghan veterans—including Zakariya Miloudi, who was implicated in the 2003 Casablanca bombings—helped establish a jihadi network in Morocco, mainly in poor neighborhoods. These cells today constitute the base of jihadi activism in Morocco. However, it is unclear

whether these various cells and networks are connected within a common organization—the Salafiya Jihadiya.

Evidence of the existence of the Salafiya Jihadiya as an operational group is scarce. The Salafiya Jihadiya is most correctly described as a radical ideology, rooted in Morocco and spread by a network of local preachers. The discourses of the Salafiya Jihadiya are used by local militants to recruit jihadis and to legitimate the use of political violence.

Although links between the ideological and operational levels are very likely, it is uncertain whether Salafiya Jihadiya actually constitutes a cohesive organization. In fact, this seems doubtful after witnessing various Moroccan terrorists and ideologues remorselessly denouncing each other during the trial that followed the 2003 Casablanca attacks. The loose nature of the Salafiya Jihadiya, nevertheless, does not make the jihadi threat in Morocco less real, especially in the light of jihadi groups such as the al-Qaeda-related Groupe Islamique Combattant Marocain (GICM). The GICM, assorted local cells and even isolated self-radicalized individuals constitute a direct threat to Morocco and to regional stability as they foster the Algerian and Iraqi insurgencies. The Salafiya Jihadiya continues to promote this instability within Morocco.

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Was Alleged al-Qaeda Attack a Failed Attempt to Occupy the U.S. Consulate in Istanbul?

The July 9 attack on the U.S. consulate in Istanbul refocused international attention on al-Qaeda's Turkish branch. Three attackers and three police officers died in the ensuing gun battle. Unlike al-Qaeda's trademark bomb attacks, this assault took the form of a gun battle. If it was indeed carried out by al-Qaeda, it would have been a rare instance of the organization engaging in a gun battle outside of the "jihad zones" of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Investigators identified the assailants as Erkan Kargin, Bulent Cinar and Raif Topcil. Cinar has a criminal record for theft and Kargin for swindling. It has been determined that Kargin traveled from a border province, Agri, to Iran in September 2006 and then re-entered Turkey

through Ataturk International Airport in May 2007. Police confirmed that Kargin hitchhiked his way to Afghanistan during his absence and received training there in Salafist ideology and terrorism methods (*Milliyet*, July 10; *Today's Zaman*, July 12).

As part of its strategic thinking, al-Qaeda has formed various coalitions in the Muslim world to organize its bases and carry out attacks in a range of countries. The Turkish press, on various occasions, has reported that al-Qaeda's Turkish branch formed institutional ties with the radical Great Eastern Islamic Raiders' Front (Islami Buyukdogu Akincilar Cephesi - IBDA-C) and recruits former or active militants from the Turkish Hizbullah (for IBDA-C ties with al-Qaeda see *Terrorism Focus*, December 5, 2007; for the Turkish Hizbullah, see *Terrorism Monitor*, January 24). For instance, in its devastating synagogue bombing in 2003, one of the al-Qaeda attackers was a former Hizbullah member (*Hurriyet*, December 1, 2003). Following the bombing, the Turkish press reported that an anonymous person made a phone call to the state-owned news agency, Anadolu Ajansi, and claimed that the attack was a joint operation of IBDA-C and al-Qaeda (*Radikal*, November 20, 2003).

Police believe that the attack on the U.S. consulate is a joint effort of IBDA-C and al-Qaeda (*Radikal*, July 9; see also *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, July 10). Al-Qaeda documents were reportedly found in the assailants' residences in Istanbul (*Hurriyet*, July 10). In an interview with the weekly magazine *Aktuel*, Saadetin Ustaosmanoglu, editor of the IBDA-C *Furkan* magazine, said: "People should be surprised if a Muslim who lives in a remote corner of the world and Muslims who live here do not cooperate. When it comes to IBDA-C—al-Qaeda relations, I neither accept nor deny it" (*Aktuel* [Istanbul], July 17).

If the U.S. consulate attack was indeed a joint project of IBDA-C and al-Qaeda, what was the reason behind the attack? Why was the attack carried out as a gun battle, not as a suicide bombing?

Turkish dailies reported that the reason behind the attack could be "revenge" for the death of a friend of attack leader Erkan Kargin. Kargin's friend, Abdul Fettah, a Turkish al-Qaeda member, was killed by U.S. troops while fighting in Afghanistan five days before the consulate attack (*Hurriyet*, July 10). The liberal daily *Taraf* also claimed that the attack was planned to take revenge for a January operation by the Turkish police against al-Qaeda in Antep province (*Taraf*, July 10). The police operation in Antep ended with a gun battle in which a police officer lost

his life and five others were wounded, while two al-Qaeda members were killed and 18 others detained (*Hurriyet*, January 24). *Baran* magazine, an IBDA-C publication, claimed that the operation against al-Qaeda in Antep was planned by the United States and carried out by the Turkish police (*Baran*, January 31).

The Turkish media's claim that revenge was a motive in the assault appears to contradict the nature of carefully planned al-Qaeda attacks. A friend of Erkan Kargin told the police that Kargin was forming a group in a mosque outside state control and asked him to join. One day Kargin said that he was planning to attack the U.S. consulate and take some hostages there. In addition Kargin said that he had examined the place where the consulate is located and made a plan to occupy the building (*Radikal*, July 14). Two hand-drawn sketches of the consulate were found by police in one of the attackers' home (Ihlas Haber Ajansi, July 11).

Interior Minister Besir Atalay announced that the assault was a suicide attack, but some local terrorism analysts argued that the attack was intended to be a "hit and run" operation, arguing that assailants did not calculate the presence of traffic police officers who were in the area at the time and joined the gun battle when they saw terrorists attacking their colleagues guarding the U.S. consulate (*Milliyet*, July 11; *Taraf*, July 14; *Star* [Istanbul], July 14).

When the attack is analyzed closely, however, it seems that neither the interior minister nor the terrorism experts are right in their claims. If it was a suicide attack, one might have expected the use of explosives. If it was a hit and run attack, the attackers appear to have exposed themselves needlessly in a futile assault. The site of the gun battle is located at the bottom of a valley with many buildings. If they had considered a hit and run attack, the assailants could have easily hidden in one of those buildings, firing on the consulate and escaping from there.

The plan, however, appears to have been to occupy the consulate, taking several hostages on behalf of al-Qaeda. Although it escaped the notice of much of the Turkish press, a terrorism expert of the Turkish police mentioned that the police "are working on the possibility of whether the attack was planned to occupy the consulate... The terrorists preferred to attack against the busiest entrance of the consulate where civilians enter for visa applications. The terrorists could plan to create panic by killing the police officer at the door and sneak into the consulate

during the panic. However when the traffic police joined the gun battle they could not carry out what they planned to do" (*Milliyet*, July 11).

The materials found on the dead terrorists, such as a Koran and what police described as "Arabic scripted fabrics," suggest that Kargin's group was planning to occupy the consulate (*Vatan*, July 10). During the occupation, the terrorists may have wanted to use these materials as propaganda tools. It is not common for al-Qaeda militants to carry such materials in their possession on their way to an attack because it could endanger the entire operation if one of the attackers is stopped by a random police search on the street and such materials are discovered. Although no further details on the "fabrics" are available at the moment, it is possible the attackers had planned to display these materials in the windows of an occupied consulate.

The Turkish interior minister's hasty press release declaring the incident a suicide attack suggests that the authorities may be aware of the aim of the attack. It might indeed have been an attempt to occupy the consulate to take hostages, but authorities probably did not reveal these aspects because it might have inspired other terrorists around the world to plan similar attacks. If it was not an attempt to occupy the consulate, it needs to be explained why an individual trained in terrorist methods in Afghanistan would lead such a high-risk but ultimately ineffectual operation.

Assuming that it was an attempt to occupy the strongly defended U.S. consulate, the attack would have been a grave embarrassment for U.S. and Turkish security institutions if successful. A Turkish counter-terrorism expert specializing in al-Qaeda suggests that "as long as there is an American consulate it is a target to al-Qaeda." Since there is no way to drive a truck loaded with explosives into the consulate, it seems likely that the leader of the cell, Erkan Kargin, planned to occupy the consulate in order to humiliate the United States and Turkey. Thanks to random police officers who happened to be at the scene and had the courage to join the gun battle, the attackers failed to carry out their assault. Although it failed, the attack at least has the potential to inspire al-Qaeda operatives or home grown terrorists to attempt the occupation of foreign embassies and consulates around the world.

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