

attacks on the continent was arguably not a core objective of the Maghrebi groups, it is now a part of AQIM's objectives. With this in mind, much of the rhetoric surrounding the merger specifically identified attacking Western countries, particularly France, as central to AQIM's strategy (Terrorism Focus, September 26, 2006; Terrorism Focus, August 7).

One must also not overlook the implications this may potentially have for North America. Although it must be plainly stated that the perceived threat from AQIM to the United States is low, there are indications that North African groups continue to maintain networks in North America and that there is a potential, albeit remote, for these networks to become operational. This gains credence remembering the case of Ahmed Ressay, an Algerian national and the so called "Millennium Bomber," who was based in Montreal and who had plans to bomb Los Angeles International Airport on New Year's Eve in 1999 [4]. To make this network operational, al-wadoud and his organization must find a narrative that sufficiently resonates within this network, an onerous task and one potentially made more difficult with the recent leadership troubles (Terrorism Monitor, September 13).

Conclusion

In sum, while AQIM's ascent has raised the specter of a revitalized and expansive jihad in North Africa—one which may include coordinated operations throughout the region and the West—the unsteadiness in the group's leadership among other factors have cast doubt on AQIM's future prospects. Regardless of his fate as the leader of AQIM, it appears the reformation process al-wadoud enacted has fundamentally recast the Maghrebi jihad by altering both the character of his Algerian movement and the structure of the regional jihad at large. As evident from the high number of attacks and casualties in September, AQIM is becoming increasingly active and lethal, and the group has demonstrated a willingness to perpetrate large-scale, suicide bombings in urban environments. These attacks and the proliferation of media material over the past year have bolstered AQIM's relevancy in the regional counter-terrorism discourse and reinserted the North African arena into the conscience of the Global Salafi-Jihad.

Notes

1. See Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophets Banner*.
2. The group's recent website, <http://www.qmagreb.org>, has been shut down multiple times, but usually reappears a few days later.
3. For an assessment of Morocco's tourist industry and its capacity to overcome a terrorist attack, see *Terrorism Monitor*, June 7. Separately, energy targets are a popular theme in the jihadi narrative, and have featured strongly in the writings of Abu Musab al-Suri, Ayman al-Zawahiri and several other strategists linked to the North African arena.
4. For an examination of this network, see Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2004.

Austria

Infiltrating the Muslim Elite? Controversy Over the Muslim Brotherhood

Source: OSC Analysis, 10/25/2007 20:24

A polemic has broken out during the last year over allegations that leading Austrian Muslims harbor ties to the Muslim Brotherhood or sympathize with its "ideology." Although Austria until recently has been considered successful in integrating its

Muslim population, many Austrians have now grown concerned about whether their approach to integration is working. Some have charged Austria's leading Muslim organizations, such as the Islamic Faith Community, of sympathy or even support for the Muslim Brotherhood. Although open sources cannot confirm ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, they do suggest that allegations of sympathy for the Brotherhood represent code language for the charge that prominent Austrian Muslims are hostile to integration. The allegations thus serve as rhetorical weapons against these Muslim organizations.

Background

Whether the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) exists in Austria, and, if so, to what extent, has recently become the subject of an intense debate. In a series of articles and essays, Wiener Zeitung journalist Stefan Beig and political scientist Thomas Schmidiger, have accused some Muslim organizations of supporting the MB. Beig bases his accusations on the "expertise" of Schmidiger, who is a doctoral candidate at the University of Vienna. They have alleged, for example, that the official umbrella organization representing Muslims in Austria, the Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Oesterreich (IGGIOe, Islamic Faith Community in Austria), has inculcated MB "ideology" in schools. They have also alleged that leading figures in such organizations as the Islamische Liga der Kultur, the Vienna-based Schura Mosque, and the Muslim Youth Organization in Austria have expressed sympathy for, and even extended financial support to, Iraqi insurgents, HAMAS, and the Egyptian MB.

The Muslim Brotherhood and Muslim Brother "Ideology"

The Muslim Brotherhood (MB), founded in Egypt by Hasan al-Banna in 1928, has offered an Islamic alternative to the middle-eastern secular nationalist response to colonialism and its legacies. Whether the MB approach is compatible with democracy, or whether it implies an Islamist theocracy, has been at the heart of much of the controversy surrounding the MB since its inception. Then-Egyptian President Nasser banned the organization in 1954, viewing it as a threat to his version of secular Arab nationalism (Al-Banna's son-in-law, Saïd Ramadan, father of the well-known European-Muslim theologian Tariq Ramadan, fled to Geneva at this time). Some argue that HAMAS claims direct lineage from the MB and that Muslim Brother organizations provide financial support for HAMAS. In the 1980's, the MB officially renounced violence. In Egypt, several members now serve as "independents" in the Egyptian parliament, arguing, in effect, that the MB is a fundamentally democratic organization.

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Currently, in Austria, the charge that a Muslim organization is an "adherent" of the MB, or supports MB "ideology," is intended to be understood as a charge that that particular Muslim organization is hostile to integration and committed to establishing an Islamist polity in Europe. Open sources cannot confirm MB membership on the part of the main Austrian Muslim organizations, or leading Austrian Muslims, partly because the MB remains a clandestine organization (it is still banned in Egypt). Many European Muslim organizations are presumed to be a part of, or close to, the MB, including the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE), the French Union Organisation Islamique Francaise (UOIF), and the German Islamische Gemeinschaft Deutschlands. In the case of Austria, the accusation, valid or not, that an organization has ties to the MB, serves as code language for an organization hostile to European democracy and civilization. Specific public policy positions of organizations such as the IGGIOe, on issues regarding Islamic religious instruction in public schools, or the building of mosques, are interpreted against the backdrop of an alleged "hidden agenda" of instituting an Islamist society.

Integration and Radicalization in Austria

Until recently, scholars and government experts considered Austria a positive model for the integration of first and second generation Muslims.1 Unlike in Germany, for

example, Islam received official recognition as early as 1912.² In 1979, the government recognized the IGGIOe as the official representative of Austrian Muslims and the government's negotiating partner on all policy matters concerning Islam.

Gradually, however, the Austrian model and many leading Austrian Muslim figures have come under attack. A number of recent official reports have cast doubt on the success of integration. In the resulting debate, some have accused the IGGIOe of being insufficiently representative of the Austrian Muslim community. Some have also accused the IGGIOe of harboring an MB agenda, meaning a wish to introduce an Islamist system by stealth.

- A 2006 government study on the state of integration in Austria by the German legal scholar Mathias Rohe, analyzed Muslim and non-Muslim attitudes toward the many issues -- such as the wearing of headscarves, religious education, and the problem of "parallel societies" -- that have defined integration debates across Europe. The results highlighted the continuing challenges facing Austrians as they attempt to realize a truly integrated society (Rohe, 2006). A group of the leading Muslim organizations in Austria issued a statement warning against what it considered a negative misunderstanding of the study and the growing criticism of the IGGIOe (derIslam.at, 27 May 2006).

- The 2005 report of the Austrian Office for the Protection of the Constitution stated, "in Austria, like in Europe as a whole, the Muslim Brotherhood is widely represented. Though it does not have any official presence in Austria, it has many representatives in many mosques, Islamic associations and organizations" (www.bmi.gv.at).³ This OSC product is based exclusively on the content and behavior of selected media and has not been coordinated with other US Government components. 2 25 October 2007

As a debate on the Austrian model of integration developed over the course of 2006, the IGGIOe came under increasing attack for its supposedly failed policy of "integration through participation."

- During the spring of 2006, Guenther Ahmed Rusznak, an ethnic German convert to Islam, founded the Islamic Information and Documentation Center (Islamische Informations - und Dokumentationszentrum, or IIDZ) as a more secular and pro-European Islamic organization (Salzburger Nachrichten, www.salzburg.com, 5 April 2006). The IIDZ has led a concerted attack on the IGGIOe in the Austrian media, accusing it of a lack of "representativeness" as an organization and of inhibiting successful integration ("Von Unwahrheiten, Halbwahrheiten und anderen Luegen," www.iidz.at).

- According to the online Muslim magazine Kismet, Rusznak accused the IGGIOe of serving as a "center of fundamentalism" (kismetonline.at, nd). Speaking to the Austrian daily Die Presse, he called for the reform or abolition of the IGGIOe because of its "undemocratic structures" (www.diepresse.at, 7 February 2007).

IGGIOe

The IGGIOe has been recognized by the state as the official umbrella organization for Muslims in Austria since 1979, serving as the official representative for Muslims vis-a-vis the Austrian Government, much as the Catholic Church does for Austrian Catholics.⁴ Similar to the corresponding Catholic, Protestant and Jewish organizations, the IGGIOe takes a leading role in shaping religious education for Austrian Muslim children at the primary and secondary levels. Owing to the IGGIOe's official status, many experts have considered Austria an integration success story.⁵

IGGIOe Inculcating MB "Ideology"? This year, some journalists and other "experts" have accused the IGGIOe of using its privileged position to inculcate MB "ideology" in Austria.

- Wiener Zeitung journalist Stefan Beig has written a series of articles in the last

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year alleging IGGIOe support for HAMAS, concluding that this proves that the IGGIOe secretly supports the MB (see the July 2007 OSC Report, Islamic Bulletin for Austria 19-25 July 07). In a 25 July interview with University of Vienna Political Scientist Thomas Schmidiger, Beig mentions that the IGGIOe had for eight years ensured that Muslim secondary students in Austria read Yusuf al-Qaradawi's book, The Permitted and the Forbidden in Islam, thus supposedly proving again the IGGIOe's determination to inculcate Brotherhood views (www.wienerzeitung.at).⁶

- The IGGIOe admits that the purpose of its educational policy is to inculcate a sense of Muslim identity, particularly among second generation Muslims. It nevertheless claims that its religious education policy is aimed at demonstrating to This OSC product is based exclusively on the content and behavior of selected media and has not been coordinated with other US Government components. 3 25 October 2007

Muslim students the compatibility of Islam with Austrian and European culture (www.derislam.at, 26 May 2007).

The IGGIOe's approach to Islam and integration give rise to different interpretations.

The accusations concerning the IGGIOe's, and many of its affiliated organizations', approach to militancy and the MB coincide with doubts about the IGGIOe's approach to Islam and integration. At the Austrian Imam Conference in Vienna on 24 April 2005, the Austrian Muslim elite, of which the IGGIOe is the head, issued a statement on the relationship between Islamic identity and the need for integration into Austrian society. The final resolution states that the IGGIOe considers the survival of a distinctly Muslim culture and identity in Europe critical. Yet its definition of a Muslim identity focuses on religious practice and the rigorous interpretation of the earliest Islamic sources, rather than a more "modernized" Muslim identity. On the one hand, the rigorous recourse to the three earliest sources, the Koran, the Sunna, and the Hadith, is directed against militant Islamists who claim justification from such sources. On the other hand, leading figures of the Austrian Muslim community have voiced skepticism toward a new, "Euro-Islam."⁷

- An earlier analysis of Islamic education in Germany and Austria argues that the IGGIOe emphasizes religious practice, rather than membership in a worldwide Muslim community, or Ummah.⁸ The IGGIOe would thus appear to work against the basic trend noticed by experts of a more universalistic "Euro-Islam."⁹

The Islamic Cultural League

Many commentators believe that the Vienna-based Islamic Cultural League (Islamische Liga der Kultur) has ties to the MB. The League, whose website (www.ligakultur.net), is currently under construction is known to be affiliated with the transnational FIOE, presumed to be an MB organization with other alleged affiliates, the French UOIF, and the German Islamische Gemeinschaft Deutschlands.

- Thomas Schmidinger alleges that Aiman Morad, a member of the League's executive board, finance director of the Islamic Religious Pedagogical Academy, and chief of the IGGIOe's religious education department, is a Syrian MB member. Furthermore, to Schmidinger, Morad and the League demonstrated its closeness to the MB by inviting Egyptian member of parliament and Muslim Brother, Mohammad Sa'd al-Katatni, to Vienna to speak at the League (support.wzonline.at, 3 July 2007).

- Karl Pfeifer, a columnist for the news portal www.judentum.net, writes that on 17 October 2006 he witnessed Morad deliver an anti-Israeli and anti-American tirade that blamed the West for all of the Muslim world's problems. To Pfeifer, this undermines the "liberal Muslim" claims of the Austrian Muslim elite, of which Morad is a member (www.judentum.net). This OSC

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Omar al-Rawi

Schmidinger and others have also accused Omar al-Rawi, the IGGIOe's chief of integration and member of the Austrian Social Democrats, of ties to the MB. Al-Rawi is one of the most prominent politically active Muslims in the country. As one of the leading members of the IGGIOe, cofounder of the Austrian Muslim Initiative (Initiative oesterreichische Muslime), and Sozialistische Partei Oesterreichs (SPOe) deputy on the Vienna city council, Al-Rawi portrays his work as dedicated to the task of integrating immigrant Muslims into Austrian society.

Toward Integration?

In his many public comments about the problems of integration, Al-Rawi has made two basic points. First, he argues that Muslim immigrants should make their integration into Austrian society a priority. Following a cardinal principle of the IGGIOe, Austrian Muslims are just that, Austrian Muslims. Secondly, he often claims that discrimination is responsible for the difficulties of integrating Muslims into Austrian society.

- Al-Rawi has warned against sympathizing with terrorism. After the July 2005 bombings in London, for example, he argued in Vienna's Die Presse, that "we need a clear, unconfused concept of Islam in this respect [i.e. against religious justifications for violence]. . . . Those who secretly delight in, or sympathize with, assassinations must know that they are accomplices to such crimes" (EUP20050728086014, 28 July 2005).

- Al-Rawi advocates a concept of integration that stresses assimilation reconcilable with a Muslim identity. In an interview with Islamonline.net, the internet paper associated with Al-Qaradawi, in January 2005, Al-Rawi urged mosques to do more to facilitate the Muslim integration. Praising Adnan Ibrahim's Al-Shura mosque as a model, the article quoted him indirectly as saying that this mosque had helped "Muslims to amalgamate with society" (16 January 2005).

- Speaking on ORF Television in May 2007, he said that too few Muslims had advanced to the middle class because of a lack of education and German-speaking ability.¹⁰ Al-Rawi has highlighted his own position as a social democratic politician to stress his commitment to Austrian social democracy, rather than to Islam, as the organizing principle of his political views.¹¹ This OSC product is based exclusively on the content and behavior of selected media and has not been coordinated with other US Government components. 5 25 October 2007

Yet when commenting on the problems of Muslim integration in Austria, Al-Rawi will often exclusively emphasize social and cultural impediments placed by native Austrians and Austrian institutions. He thereby demonstrates one of the problems noted by Rohe's 2006 study on the state of integration, a "nurturing of an attitude of victim hood" (Rohe, 2006).

- In his commentary in Die Presse following the 2005 London attacks, he coupled his condemnation of terrorism with a reminder that one should focus on the "causes" rather than the "symptoms" of terror. That is, "sustainable results are achievable when we offer something better at the end of the day, paving the way for better ideas and more convincing objectives" (EUP200507286014, 28 July 2005).

- In a forum on integration in the Austrian journal Falter, in 2004, Al-Rawi responded to a comment from Buelent Oeztoplu, who blamed political Islam for the "alienation" of Austrian Muslim youth. Al-Rawi stated that "one cannot blame Islam for this sense of alienation. Rather, for that, society is responsible. We must ask ourselves, why is there this feeling of exclusion. Islam offers the

youth an identity and a second home" (www.falter.at, 7 April 2004). Schmidinger accuses Al-Rawi of closeness to the MB. His argument rests primarily on guilt by association.

- Schmidinger argues that Al-Rawi's concept of "integration through participation" is identical to that of Tariq Ramadan's, the prominent Muslim intellectual based in Geneva. Ramadan, grandson of MB founder Hassan al-Banna, has long been the subject of controversy over whether his vision of an integrated "Euro-Islam" represents MB "ideology" in disguise. Assuming Ramadan's affiliation with the Brotherhood, Schmidinger accuses Al-Rawi of, at the least, advancing the interests of MB "ideology." "The concept of integration of the official IGGIOe is identical with that of Tariq Ramadan's." In fact, Schmidinger accuses Al-Rawi of using the Initiative of Austrian Muslims (IMOE or Initiative Muslimischer OesterreicherInnen) as a vehicle to advance supposed Brotherhood concepts.¹²

- A polemic between Schmidinger and Al-Rawi began in January 2007, when Schmidinger accused the respected Vienna Imam, Adnan Ibrahim, of doublespeak, in a commentary in Die Presse (9 January 2007). Al-Rawi responded with accusations that Schmidinger was a member of a small group of disaffected German intellectuals, the "anti-Germans," who had left Germany for Austria to indulge in "pro-Zionist self-hatred" and "anti-Islamic conspiracy theories."¹³ Al-Rawi has also accused Schmidinger of affiliation with US "neoconservatives" (www.kurier.at, 7 July 2007). Schmidinger rejects accusations of membership in the "anti-Germans" as vigorously as Al-Rawi rejects accusations of membership in the MB.¹⁴

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Thomas Schmidinger

Thomas Schmidinger Source: homepage.univie.ac.at/thomas.schmidinger

Thomas Schmidinger has played the role of academic authority in many articles in the Austrian press, accusing leading Austrian Muslims of harboring MB sympathies. His essays, depicting an anti-democratic MB, have frequently been cited to buttress allegations of radicalism against the IGGIOe and other organizations. He is often interviewed about the alleged MB influence in Austria and has contributed several commentaries on the subject himself.

Schmidinger claims the title of Lehrbeauftragter (lecturer or adjunct professor). More precisely, he is a Doktorand (doctoral student), currently enrolled in the University of Vienna's political science department. Schmidinger's allegations against leading Austrian Muslims follow a consistent three-step pattern: (1) he levies an accusation against a leading Austrian Muslim, (2) he refers to a controversial issue concerning political Islam outside of Austria and misrepresents the issue as settled (for example, whether Tariq Ramadan is a radical Islamist or a modernizing liberal), and (3) associates the Austrian Muslim in question with the referenced, supposedly damning, controversy.

Doublespeak?

Suspicion has lately devolved on Adnan Ibrahim, a prominent Imam of the Vienna Shura Mosque. Lionized by Omar al-Rawi as a "star preacher" and an example of how an Imam should champion integration, critics have claimed that Ibrahim says one thing to a German-speaking audience and another to Arabic speakers.

- According to the website Sicherheit-Heute.de, which is critical of the IGGIOe and has given prominence to the accusations of Schmidinger and Rusznak, Ibrahim delivered a sermon entitled "Jihad Philosophy and Martyrdom," in which he called for Muslims to be prepared to give their lives as martyrs for "Palestine and Iraq" (20 January 2007).

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• Guenther Ahmed Rusznak has drawn attention to previous Ibrahim sermons and judgments, which Ibrahim now claims to disown, condemning Muslim-Christian intermarriage and excusing female genital mutilation.¹⁵

• In response to some anonymous accusations, the Vienna Prosecutors Office investigated charges that Ibrahim had instigated his followers to Jihad. According to a 27 July statement by Minister of Justice Maria Berger, the recordings made of this OSC product is based exclusively on the content and behavior of selected media and has not been coordinated with other US Government components.
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Ibrahim's sermons had been edited, with comments taken out of context and some comments not clearly attributable to Ibrahim, casting doubt on the accusations against him (www.parlinkomgiv.at, 30 July 2007).

Implications

Monitored open sources cannot confirm alleged sympathy or outright connections between the Austrian Muslim elite and the militant MB. The Austrian Government has not released detailed information about an MB presence in its annual reports on threats to the constitution. The public claims of the critics of the IGGIOe, the legitimacy of which rests on the academic credentials of those making the claims, are dubious. In the one case, that of Adnan Ibrahim, in which the Austrian Government commented on the charges, it suggested that the accusations rested on weak evidence.

End Notes:

1 See, for example, Sieglinda Katharina Rosenberger, "Governing Religious Diversity in Austria - Framework for Europe?" 2006, www.ces.fas.harvard.edu. Hayrettin Ayden, Dirk Halm, Faruk Sen, "'Euro-Islam' Das neue Islamverstaendnis der Muslime in der Migration," 2003, study conducted by the Stiftung Zentrum fuer Tuerkeistudien for the Renner Institut and posted at www.renner-institut.at.

2 For an historical overview of Austria's internal regulation of Islam, see Martina Schmied, "Islam in Oesterreich," at www.bmlv.gv.at.

3 The 2006 and 2007 reports contain no entries on the Muslim Brotherhood.

4 This contrasts with the situation in Germany, where there is no analogous Muslim institution like the Protestant (EKD) or Catholic churches with which the state can confer on issues -- such as education -- that touch religious interests.

5 Thus University of Vienna Political Scientist Sieglinda Katharina Rosenberger argues that the Austrian state-church system, as applied to the Muslim community through the IGGIOe, "strengthen's integration rather than separation." See Rosenberger's "Governing Religious Diversity in Austria - A Framework for Europe?" paper presented at the Center for European Studies at Harvard, 7 April 2006, www.ces.fas.harvard.edu.

6 Whether one should classify Qaradawi as a Muslim Brother has been hotly debated among scholars and analysts for some time.

7 See the final statement of the "Austrian Imam Conference," 24 April 2005, posted on the IGGIOe website, www.derislam.at

8 Irka-Christin Mohr, "Islamic Instruction in Germany and Austria: A comparison of Principles Derived from Religious Thought," Cahiers d'etudes sur la Mediterranee orientale et le monde turco-iranien, No. 33, 2002.

9 See, for example, Peter Mandaville, "Critical Islam & Muslim Identity: Interpretation, Belonging, and Citizenship Among Muslims in Europe & North America," paper delivered at a conference on "Migration, Religion and Secularism - Comparative

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Approach (Europe and North America)," Paris, June 17-18, 2005, at
www.histoire-sociale.univ-paris1.fr).

10 Markus Mueller, "Der Islam in Oesterreich", ORF-Oe1 16 May 2007, as posted on
www.antifa.co.at. This OSC product is based exclusively on the content and behavior
of selected media and has not been coordinated with other US Government components.
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11 "Wir sind keine Aktiengesellschaft," interview with Al-Rawi, www.kurier.at, 7
July 2007.

12 Schmidinger, "Tariq Ramadan und die Muslim Brueder in Europa," no date,
homepage.univie.ac.at/thomas.schmidinger.

13 Al-Rawi, "Woelfe im Schafspelz? Replik auf Thomas Schmidinger, der versucht, eine
Weltverschwörungstheorie von bedrohlicher muslimischer Unterwanderung in
Oesterreich zu verbreiten," Die Presse, 16 January 2007.

14 Ibid.

15 Karl Pfeifer, "Islam in Oesterreich: - so waren wir alle getaeuscht: Bericht von
einer wiener Pressekonferenz," posted on hagalil.com, 9 February 2007.

Azerbaijan

One 'Wahhabi' Killed, Two Arrested In Azerbaijan - Agency

Source: Baku Turan in Russian 0733 GMT 27 Oct 07

The National Security Ministry carried out a special operation against a group of
armed people in country house No 104 in the settlement of Mastaga [near Baku] this
morning. Two men were arrested and one was killed while putting up armed resistance,
Turan has learnt from informed sources.

When proposed to give himself up, one of those inside the house threw a grenade at
special squad soldiers and then was gunned down. Three assault rifles, several
grenades and other ammunition were discovered at the country house during the
search.

According to preliminary information, the criminals were wahhabis and were not
residents of the settlement. It is noteworthy that one of the impounded assault
rifles was the one which had been stolen from a military unit by fugitive officer
Kamran Asadov, who is also a wahhabi. The prosecutor's office has started an
investigation into the case.

Bangladesh

Two Bangladesh Militants Jailed For 20 Years - Paper

Source: Dhaka New Age in English 0000 GMT 26 Oct 07

Sylhet divisional speedy trial tribunal on Thursday, 25 October, sentenced two
members of Jamiat-ul-Mojahedin Bangladesh (JMB) to 20 years' imprisonment in two
cases filed in connection with the 17 August bomb explosion in Sunamganj town.
Dipraman Sarker, judge of the tribunal, handed down the verdict in the presence of

Abdul Aziz alias Hanif, body guard of the executed chief of the banned outfit Shaikh Abdur Rahman, and Salah Uddin alias Saleheen.

The tribunal also fined them Tk 10,000 each, in default to suffer two more years, court sources said. According to the prosecution, JMB men carried out bomb attacks on the Shahi Eidgah premises in Sunamganj town and the district bar building as a part of its countrywide near simultaneous bomb attacks on 17 August 2005.

Jasim Uddin Faruq, ward commissioner of the Sunamganj municipality, lodged a case in connection with a bomb attack at Eidgah while Sazzadur Rahman, office assistant of the district bar association, filed another case in connection with a bomb blast at the district bar building. The police on June 30, 2006 submitted charge sheets against Hanif and Salehin who were also sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment in other four cases.

Columbia

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(In the Colombian town of Cali, police disarmed a powerful home-made bomb. Alerted by local citizens, the suspicious device turned out to have the equivalent power of 25 Kg of TNT and a fairly sophisticated detonation system which was designed to be detonated by a cell phone signal. According to Cali Chief of Police, General Jesus Antonio Gomez, the device was meant for security personnel, and was likely the work of the "Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia". Two other smaller devices were found in the same area, according to Gomez.)

France

French Court Convicts Algerian Of Paris Bombings

Source: Reuters, 26 Oct 07

A French court jailed Algerian Rachid Ramda for life on Friday for his role in financing a spate of bomb attacks on the Paris underground rail network that killed eight people and wounded 200 others in 1995.

Paris Assizes Court ordered that Ramda should serve a minimum 22 years behind bars for his role in the attacks, the worst bombings on mainland France since world war Two. Court president Didier Wacogne, sitting with six professional assessors, said Ramda was "guilty of complicity to murder and attempted murder" as well as an array of explosives and other offences. Around 70 relatives and friends of victims of the attacks were present for the verdict which was met in silence. Ramda, 38, who denied the charges, was sentenced to 10 years in prison in 2006 for terrorist conspiracy linked to the same bombing campaign.

His lawyer Sebastien Bonot protested during the case that Ramda was being tried a second time for the same crime, and said after Friday's verdict that his client would appeal. "This decision is certainly not a surprise but we feel that justice and the law have not been done," he told reporters. The prosecution said Ramda was a key figure in Algeria's radical Armed Islamic Group (GIA), and added that phone taps showed he was in regular contact with Ali Touchent and Boualem Bensaid, the GIA's coordinators in France. A police search of Ramda's London address produced a western Union payment slip bearing his fingerprints which showed he had sent 5,000 pounds (\$10,250) to the Paris bombers. The GIA claimed responsibility for bombings that were part of a campaign to punish French support for Algerian authorities that scrapped multi-party elections in 1992 that an Islamic party had been poised to win.

"Londonistan"

During his month-long trial Ramda denied involvement in the attacks and caused uproar among victims' families present in public gallery when he said those responsible for the carnage deserved the death penalty. Bensaid and another man, Smain Ali Belkacem, are currently serving long prison terms for planting the gas cylinder bombs that investigators said were packed with nails and bolts to cause maximum injury. Friday's conviction marked the culmination of a long battle by the French authorities to try Ramda, who spent 10 years in detention in Britain fighting extradition to France. Ramda was arrested on a French warrant in 1995 but Britain refused to send him back to France on the grounds he might face mistreatment by anti-terrorism police. French authorities accused the British of underestimating the threat posed by Islamic militants based in the British capital -- which was dubbed "Londonistan" by some critics of British policy. However, following the deaths of 52 people in the July 2005 suicide bomb attacks on London's transport system, the mood changed in Britain and Ramda was extradited in December 2005. [As Dr. Boaz Ganor frequently reminds PTSS audiences, "The free world must understand that "cultural relativism" applied to terrorism - whatever the terrorists' goals - will lead only to more terrorism.]

Georgia

Georgia Stops Armenians Entering Turkey With Radioactive Matter

Source: Associated Press via Dow Jones, 26 Oct 07

The four men were carrying 2 grams of Lovresium or LAV-103, a radioactive isotope.

Georgian border guards detained four Armenians attempting to cross into Turkey this week with just over 2 grams of a radioactive substance, the former Soviet republic's border police service said Friday. The Armenians were detained at a border crossing into eastern Turkey on Wednesday with the substance in a special container, the border police said in a statement. It identified the substance as an isotope called Lovresium, or LAV-103, but no reference to such an isotope could immediately be found. Georgian authorities were attempting to determine where the detainees got the substance and what they were planning to do with it, border police spokeswoman Lela Mchedladze said.

Germany

German SPD Congress Rebuffs Schaeuble: Rule of Law Vital in Combating Terror

Source: ddp in German 1850 GMT 26 Oct 07

The Social Democratic Party of Germany [SPD] is calling for the rule of law to be maintained in combating terrorism, and has rebuffed the plans of Federal Interior Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble (Christian Democratic Union [CDU]). "We are opposed to any and every attempt to sacrifice the open nature of our democratic society to the illusion of a security society," states a policy paper adopted by the party congress in Hamburg on Friday [26 October]. The SPD will therefore "not accept the military being entrusted with internal policing functions."

The protection of security and freedom formed the basis of a libertarian society, it was argued. The SPD therefore resolutely opposed any call that was incompatible with these fundamental values. This applied for example to the abandonment of the presumption of innocence in criminal law, the targeted killing of suspects, the internment of "persons posing a danger," along with the announcement of an order for a passenger aircraft to be shot down.

From the technical point of view, the powers of the Federal Crime Police Office (BKA) also had to be fully in tune with the latest developments. However, this did nothing to alter the particular impact of online searches [of suspects' computers] on citizens' rights, as many legal and technical issues were thereby raised. "For this reason, we wish to initially await the Federal Constitutional Court's ruling on online searches under North Rhine - Westphalia's constitutional protection [homeland intelligence] law, so as not to unnecessarily incur the risk of a ruling of unconstitutionality," the agreed paper adds.

Hizballah Keeps Low Profile, Capable of Mobilizing

Source: OSC Analysis in English, 25 Oct 07

German authorities have recently stepped up efforts in monitoring Hizballah-related activities and have identified several key sites frequented by Hizballah supporters. Open source reporting suggests that, at present, the Hizballah sympathizers are only loosely organized, value Germany as a mediator, and have made a conscious decision to keep a low profile. At the same time, Hizballah sympathizers have shown some capability to mobilize public support for their cause, especially over the internet. Media reporting indicates that Hizballah has been linked to terror-related activities in Europe in the past.

German Authorities Identify Key Hizballah-Associated Sites

Although German authorities have been aware of a latent Hizballah presence in Germany for many years, the fighting between Israel and Hizballah in 2006 and Germany's ensuing maritime contribution to the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) prompted many German politicians and security officials to question whether the fighting and Germany's role in stopping weapons smuggling into Lebanon could lead to Hizballah sympathizers in Germany committing acts of violence domestically. Subsequently, several governmental reports identified locations frequented by Hizballah activists and sympathizers.

* In February 2007, the German parliament issued a report stating that it was "aware of 30 cultural and mosque associations" in Germany frequented by Hizballah members or sympathizers, whose numbers it estimated to be around 900. Yet the report concluded that Hizballah supporters did not pose an "immediate threat" to the country (<http://dip.bundestag.de>, 19 February 2007).

* In 2007, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution described the Iranian-supported Islamic Center of Hamburg-ICH (Islamisches Zentrum Hamburg), which allows Hizballah-affiliated persons to use its facilities, as "Hizballah's most important contact point" in Germany (www.verfassungsschutz.hamburg.de, 15 February 2007).

* Berlin-based daily Morgen Post quoted city authorities as saying that "Lebanese Hizballah members" use the Imam Reza mosque, known for organizing the yearly anti-Israel Al-Quds Day Berlin demonstration, for meetings with Iranian officials (24 July 2006).

Sympathizers Appear To Be Only Loosely Organized

Hizballah in Germany lacks central leadership and appears to have no formal organizational structure. Some government reporting suggests that the sympathizers in Germany maintain links to Hizballah in Lebanon through personal contacts with Hizballah officials.

* In its 2006 security assessment, the Hamburg Office for the Protection of the Constitution stated that in Germany Hizballah is "represented in a number of mosque organizations operating relatively independently," adding that "Hizballah has no unified structure" (www.fhh.hamburg.de). A Westdeutscher Rundfunk public radio station, using government sources, cited the lack of a German-based leader "acceptable to all parties" as a possible reason why Hizballah leadership in Beirut has long tried "in vain" to "build an efficient structure" in Germany (27 July 2006).

* Two separate government reports assessed that the connection to Hizballah in Lebanon is maintained through individual trips to Lebanon, personal and family contacts, and emissaries sent from Lebanon to Germany, who inform sympathizers of current Hizballah directives and operations in the Middle East (www.fhh.hamburg.de; <http://dip.bundestag.de>). According to the Baden-Wuerttemberg intelligence service, "Hizballah members from Lebanon, among them shaykhs, office-holders, or members of parliament, regularly travel [to Baden-Wuerttemberg] for ceremonies" (www.verfassungsschutz-bw.de).

* In October 2001, public television station ZDF reported the official visit of the high-ranking Hizballah representative, Shaykh Ali Khatoun, to the Islamic Center of Muenster-IZM (Islamisches Zentrum Muenster), a Lebanese mosque identified by German authorities as a Hizballah "meeting place" (www.puc-web.de; www.im.nrw.de).

Hizballah Values Germany as Mediator, Keeps Low Profile...

On several occasions, Germany has acted as an arbiter between Hizballah and Israel, negotiating the release of Israeli-held Hizballah prisoners. Hizballah leadership has expressed appreciation for Germany's mediating role and has instructed its

followers there to avoid attention.

* German mediation between Israel and Hizballah resulted in the exchange of prisoners and the return of remains in 1996, 2004 and 2007 (Der Spiegel, 12 August 1996; Handelsblatt, 30 January 2004; Financial Times, 16 October 2007).

* In the past, Hizballah Secretary General Nasrallah has publicly acknowledged Germany's "important role as mediator" in Hizballah-Israeli negotiations (AFP, 22 January 2000).

* A parliamentary report stated that, regarding Germany, Hizballah's "highest priority" is an "undisturbed presence" there, adding that it "takes pains to avoid conflicts with local authorities." A State of Hamburg intelligence service report assessed that, in 2004, Hizballah Secretary General Nasrallah directed its German followers to "keep to the letter of [German] law" to avoid state scrutiny (www.deutscherbundestag.de; www.verfassungsschutz.hamburg.de).

...But Sympathizers Capable of Mobilizing Public Support, Especially via Internet

Hizballah supporters in Germany, carrying the group's paraphernalia and portraits of its Secretary General Nasrallah, showed solidarity by taking part in the many anti-Israel demonstrations held throughout Germany during the 2006 Israeli-Hizballah conflict. The large turn-out suggests that the number of Hizballah supporters in Germany exceeds official estimates and that the sympathizers are quite savvy in using the internet.

Protesters in Germany carrying Nasrallah portraits(www.netzeitung.de, 26 July 2006)

* According to a report in the weekly Der Spiegel, officers from the Office for Protection of the Constitution monitoring the 2006 anti-Israel rallies were "amazed" by the fact that the number of participants far exceeded the organizers' expectations (23 July 2006). For example, an unofficial tally of protesters at a Berlin rally was estimated at 10,000 (www.tagesspiegel.de).

* Der Spiegel reported on 23 July 2006 that at another Berlin rally about 1,500 "mostly Lebanese and Palestinian protestors" with Hizballah flags and portraits of Hizballah Secretary General Nasrallah "dominated the scene." Describing the summer 2006 demonstrations in Lower Saxony, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution report referred to a "large number of Hizballah supporters," identifiable by their "Hizballah emblems" and Nasrallah portraits (www.cdl.niedersachsen.de).

* Rallies throughout Baden-wuerttemberg and the rest of Germany were "partly coordinated and organized on the internet" by sites like www.rache-engel.de ("Revenge Angel"), which provided downloadable images and banner slogans for use in demonstrations, according to a government security report (www.verfassungsschutz-bw.de/downloads/jabe/2006/jabe-islam-2006.pdf).

* Administrators of the website www.muslim-markt.de, "probably the largest German-language internet portal for Muslims" (www.spiegel.de) use the site to promote the annual anti-Israel Al-Quds Day in Berlin, where "regime-loyal Iranians and Hizballah supporters" gather to demonstrate, according to security experts (www.berlin.de/imperia/md/content/seninn/verfassungsschutz/stand2005/jb_2006_ht_ae.pdf).

Precedents for Hizballah Terrorist Activity in Europe and Germany

Even though authorities assess that current Hizballah activity in Germany is law-abiding, the group's past illegal operations in Europe demonstrate its ability to conduct terrorist operations in the region.

* In October 2007, amidst a new round of German-brokered prisoner exchange talks between Hizballah and Israel, Germany announced its early release of a Lebanese and an Iranian prisoner convicted for the 1992 assassination of dissident Kurds in Berlin (AFP, 16 October 2007). German authorities believed the attack was ordered by Tehran and involved a "middle man for the Lebanese Hizballah" (The Guardian, 7 April 1997).

* In 2000, Hizballah operatives in Switzerland lured an Israeli businessman to the Middle East, where he was kidnapped and held by the group for years before being released in a German-brokered prisoner swap (AP, 19 April 2004).

* In 1989, German authorities arrested Hizballah associate Bassam Makki on charges of planning attacks against a synagogue and US military buildings and personnel in Germany (Sueddeutsche Zeitung, 7, 18, 21 July 1989).

[See "Arab Public Support for Hizballah, Iran, Syria Wanes" in General CT News.]

Greece

Greece to Introduce a 'Europe-wide System for Monitoring People' Says Paper

Source: Al. Avlonitis, Ethnos tis Kiriakis in Greek 21 Oct 07 46

The Greek Government has given its full consent to the introduction of a Europe-wide system for monitoring people. Its consent has been given quietly, in the name of fighting terrorism, a fight that has now been expanded to include illegal immigration and cross-border crime. The last two are believed by some to be directly connected to each other.

The government's consent has been given despite the fact that the responsible independent authorities have long warned of serious repercussions concerning the protection of fundamental rights and other, constitutionally-protected, freedoms. These include the protection of personal rights and a prohibition against the use of any personal data, some of which could be of a sensitive nature. In its latest annual report, the APPD [Authority for the Protection of Personal Data] voices several warnings about the dangers posed and stresses that its warnings have not been heeded.

The planned monitoring system provides that each country should maintain a large data base, which will be used to enter information about the DNA, fingerprints and details of any vehicles owned by suspects. At a later stage, it will include biometric data, since it appears inevitable that full use will be made of information such as the iris of the eyes, the structure of the hands, etc. All the above will be taking place in the name of security.

The data collected could be exchanged between European countries although Washington is anxiously expecting for them to be made available to the United States as well. A precedent for this exists in other measures that have been introduced, such as the agreement providing for judicial cooperation. The intention is to use the recording of personal data as a deterrent against all those either suspected or already convicted of carrying out criminal activities and, moreover, to have any such information exchanged between all countries.

Nevertheless, according to existing plans, during its second phase of implementation all the above data could be made available in order to prevent the movement of "undesirable" elements. These could include, among others, soccer hooligans that wish to see their team playing in another country but, mainly, "troublesome" demonstrators traveling to protest at the meetings of the Group of "Eight," etc.

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The government was aware of this possibility because the relevant plans were drafted during the EU's German Presidency. Nevertheless, it still decided not to object and to refrain from raising any reservations. On the contrary, it gave assurances that it was in favor of every European initiative leading to the exchange of intelligence, data, etc. Taking the opportunity presented, it raised the issue of the accelerating rate of illegal immigration and asked for financial assistance in order to fortify the Greek frontiers, since our country forms the South-Eastern corner of Europe and a major gateway for entry to the continent.

The report of the AAPD

The creation and maintenance of DNA records for use in criminal investigations will inevitably lead to dangers..

In its annual report the AAPD's chairman, Dh. Gourgourakis, stresses that the use of any records should be on a limited basis. Moreover, as he points out, there could be grave repercussions to our criminal law system if the use of the DNA data base extends to include all criminal cases and not merely extremely grave ones. The probable dangers increase due to the fact that the data base will be used not just for the investigation of criminal activities but also for their prevention. The AAPD has also expressed reservations about the intention to use biometric data for the identification of individual persons, believing that this system is prone to mistakes.

Therefore, it is possible that even though biometric data are taken from two different persons, these could be claimed to originate only from one, and vice versa. In other words, biometric data taken from the same person at different times could appear to come from different persons. This could lead to false conclusions, even if this happens in a small number of cases. From comparisons among one million sets of fingerprints, it is believed that an average of 10 false conclusions is made.

SOS for human rights

The AAPD warned a long time ago of all the unpredictable consequences and lurking dangers facing human rights because of various European agreements that allow the monitoring of persons as a deterrent measure. It has also identified a number of "grey areas" included in such agreements, such as the PRUM Convention, because they leave open the possibility of using the data base and to exchange information not only for persons already convicted but also for mere suspects or witnesses. They could also be aimed against "undesirable" troublemaking soccer fans or "troublesome" demonstrators. Furthermore, it underlines that the new proposals are a reversal of the current system governing the exchange of personal data, which is strictly regulated, within the framework of the existing cooperation between judicial and police authorities regarding criminal cases.

On the contrary, it sets up as a rule for the collection of numerous personal data, some of which could be of a sensitive nature, in order to act as a deterrent measure and allow them to be used by the authorities of other European states. This, according to the AAPD, could jeopardize constitutionally-protected human rights.

India

Maoist Rebels Kill 18 in Attack on Indian Village

Source: Ranjana Shukla Hong Kong AFP in English 0911 GMT 27 Oct 07

At least 18 people, including a former minister's son, were killed overnight when Maoist rebels opened fire on a group of football spectators in eastern India, a

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police official said Saturday. Between 30 and 40 heavily armed rebels stormed a village around midnight and opened fire on about 150 people gathered there after a match to watch a local cultural performance, police said. "Seventeen persons have been killed in the attack," district police superintendent Arun Kumar Singh told AFP in Jharkhand state. One man died later of a bullet wound, taking the toll to 18, police said, adding that a three-year-old was among the three remaining wounded. "Intensive combing operations are going on," Singh said, adding that the border with Bihar, the state to the north, had been sealed to prevent rebels from fleeing there.

The night's entertainment was organized by the brother of the former chief minister Babu Lal Marandi, whose son Anup Marandi was in Chilkhari village for the match. "The police security personnel deployed left the place after the football match," said Singh. "They did wrong. They should have stayed."

The attack echoed the assassination of federal lawmaker Sunil Mahto, who was gunned down by Maoists posing as spectators at a football match in a village in the state in March. The attackers, including several women, wore fatigues similar to those used by India's anti-terror paramilitary forces and gradually surrounded the unsuspecting crowd before opening fire, witnesses said.

The Maoist insurgency -- which grew out of a peasant uprising in eastern India in 1967 -- threatens huge swathes of India's centre, east and south and has spread to half of India's 29 states. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh last year described them as the single biggest threat to India's internal security, but the Maoists say they are only fighting for the rights of neglected tribal people and landless farmers.

Former chief minister Marandi flew on Saturday to the village, which is surrounded by heavy forest and situated 290 kilometres (180 miles) from the state capital Ranchi, but spoke to reporters before he left. "The government seems to have no idea how to get out of this situation. It is getting worse," said a calm Marandi, who was the first to run the newly-created Jharkhand state when it was carved out of Bihar in 2000. The left-wing guerrillas of the outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoist) hold sway in 16 of the 19 districts in the mineral-rich state. "The Maoists have no faith in democracy. They have concentrated in the areas where there is no development, no streets, no electricity. If we want to solve this problem, we have to move development in those areas."

Marandi's family members have organised sports and entertainment events in remote areas in a bid to encourage villagers not to support the rebels. The former chief minister said his brother and son "should have been more careful." Marandi's brother told AFP that he narrowly dodged a bullet that hit another villager in the eye and fled several kilometres (miles) before calling the police. "I saved my life by squeezing amongst the villagers and I escaped," said Nunu Lal Marandi. "I had informed police about the program and sought security. But no proper security arrangements were made."

India TV Channels Pulled After Massacre Sting Operation: Reports

Source: AFP in English 0819 GMT 27 Oct 07

Officials in the Indian state of Gujarat have blocked television channels which aired a sting operation that claimed to expose government involvement in the 2002 mass killings of Muslims, reports said Saturday. The Headlines Today private television network began Thursday broadcasting footage of men accused of taking part in the deadly Gujarat riots five years ago apparently admitting that the Hindu nationalist-ruled local government backed the violence.

On Friday cable operators in the state's commercial capital Ahmedabad received written orders to block the Aaj Tak (Until Today) and Headlines Today channels, the Indian Express newspaper reported Saturday. Channels that covered the expose, which

comes as the state readies for assembly elections in December, were also ordered to be pulled, it said. State elections officer Ashok Manek confirmed the order had been issued by top Ahmedabad district official, or collector, Dhananjay Dwivedi, the report said. Dwivedi cited concerns about sparking "communal feeling," said the report, referring to a term commonly used to describe tension between religious groups in India. Dwivedi could not be reached for comment.

Police verbally told cable operators in other parts of the state to stop carrying the channels, a Hindustan Times report said. But Gujarat government spokesman Bhagyesh Jha denied that the state had issued any orders against television channels. "I have not passed the order," said Jha. "You ask the collector (Dwivedi) about it." The channels showed interviews secretly recorded by a reporter of the investigative news magazine Tehelka (Sensation!) with several men allegedly involved in the anti-Muslim attacks. At least 2,000 people, mostly Muslims, were killed after a Muslim mob was accused of torching a train, burning 59 Hindus alive. So far, more than a dozen people have been convicted over the bloodshed. An enquiry by the state-run railways later ruled the fire on the train which sparked the riots was an accident.

Indonesia

Indonesia Restricts Rights of Three Convicted Bali Bombers Ahead of Executions

Source: Unattributed, The Sydney Morning Herald (Internet Version-WWW) in English 26 Oct 07

The three death row Bali bombers have had their prison visitation rights restricted in a bid to prevent contact with other terrorists ahead of their looming executions. Indonesia's elite anti-terror squad Detachment 88 is vetting all potential visitors, who must first apply to visit the trio in the super maximum security Batu Prison on isolated Nusakambangan Island, which is dubbed Indonesia's Alcatraz.

Authorities are inching forward in their preparations to execute bombing mastermind Imam Samudra, senior Jemaah Islamiah figure Mukhlas, aka Ali Ghufron, and his younger brother, the "smiling assassin" Amrozi bin Nurhasyim, for their role in the 2002 Bali bombings. The blasts killed 202 people, including 88 Australians, when they ripped apart Kuta's Paddy's Bar and the Sari Club on October 12, 2002. Central Java's Department of Justice and Human Rights this week said all potential visitors must now first apply to the department in writing, and enclose their Indonesian identification card. "It's for the sake of preventing convicts from meeting members of the terrorist network," the office's penitentiary division head, Bambang Winahyo, told local media this week. Physical contact including handshakes was forbidden for visitors, except for blood-relatives. Head of Batu Prison, Sudijanto, confirmed there were new restrictions in place. "The family is allowed to have physical contact, but if they are not family, then there is a restriction," he said.

"They are terrorists." The tighter security measures also follow the escape this week of two convicts from the super maximum security facility. All visits to the prison had been temporarily halted, he said. "All of our employees are deployed in the forest to look for them," Sudijanto said. "So for now we cannot receive any visitors." The pair escaped after reportedly being allowed to use a toilet at the prison clinic, where they had earlier been taken complaining of ill health. Sudijanto said one prisoner, serving 14 years for robbery, was recaptured on Thursday. The other, a convicted murderer, was still somewhere on the 30 sq km island, he said.

The three Bali bombers were transferred to the island prison, off Central Java's south coast, in 2005 for security reasons, after the second set of bombings in Bali sparked demonstrations from Balinese calling for their immediate

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execution. When AAP visited the facility two weeks ago, the three bombers said they were ready to die and would not be asking for a pardon - the final legal step before the execution can take place. "Absolutely we are not afraid," Samudra said, after being allowed to mingle, uncuffed, with other prisoners to pray for the holy Islamic day Lebaran. "That's what I've been waiting for ... firstly with execution we will go to heaven and then our wish to see god and the angels is far higher than the wish of the infidels for our death."

Iraq

Petraeus: Al-Qaida Reeling, But Still Lethal

Source: Army Times, 28 Oct 07

The threat from al-Qaida in several former strongholds in Baghdad has been significantly reduced, but criminals who have established "almost mafia-like presence" in some areas pose a new threat, the top U.S. commander in Iraq said Sunday.

Gen. David Petraeus stressed, however, the terror organization remained "a very dangerous and very lethal enemy" - a comment underscored by the abduction Sunday in Baghdad of 10 Sunni and Shiite tribal leaders who joined forces against al-Qaida. "Its presence has been significantly reduced and its activity and freedom of action have been degraded," Petraeus told a small group of reporters at a U.S. base near Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit, 80 miles north of Baghdad. He singled out success in what had been some of the most volatile Sunni neighborhoods in Baghdad, including Ghazaliyah, Amariyah, Azamiyah and Dora. "Having said that ... al-Qaida remains a very dangerous and very lethal enemy of Iraq," he said. "We must maintain contact with them and not allow them to establish sanctuaries or re-establish sanctuaries in places where they were before."

The gunmen ambushed the two cars carrying the 10 sheiks - seven Sunnis and three Shiites - in Baghdad's predominantly Shiite neighborhood of Shaab at about 3:30 p.m., police officials said. The sheiks were returning to Diyala province after attending a conference with the Shiite-dominated government's adviser for tribal affairs to discuss coordinating efforts against al-Qaida in Iraq, police and a relative said. Petraeus said the reduced threat from al-Qaida had given way to nonsectarian crimes - kidnapping, corruption in the oil industry and extortion. "As the terrible extremist threat of al-Qaida has been reduced somewhat, there is in some Iraqi neighborhoods actually a focus on crime and on extortion that has been ongoing and kidnapping cells and what is almost a mafia-like presence in certain areas," he said. Petraeus made his comments after a transition ceremony as the 1st Armored Division, which is based in Wiesbaden, Germany, assumed command of northern Iraq from the Hawaii-based 25th Infantry Division.

The new commander for the region, Maj. Gen. Mark Hertling, said the number of attacks so far in October had dropped by 300 from the previous month, although he did not provide more specific numbers. A car bomb Sunday ripped through a Kirkuk bus terminal that serves travelers to Iraq's Kurdish region, killing eight people and wounding 26, according to police Brig. Gen. Sarhat Qadir. The terminal is located in a mainly Kurdish area of Kirkuk, an oil-rich city which Iraq's Kurds want to annex to their self-rule region in the north of the country. The city's Arab and Turkomen residents dispute the Kurdish claim. Gunmen meanwhile, sprayed a car carrying five bodyguards of the head of local Sunni Endowments department in the turbulent city of Basra, killing one of them and injuring the rest, police said. Also in Basra, a mainly Shiite city 340 miles southeast of Baghdad, a local elections official was gunned down late Saturday in front of his house.

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The police officials who reported both attacks spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the media. They did not give a motive for the attacks. But while the attack on the bodyguards may have had a sectarian motive – the Sunni Endowment is a state agency that looks after the sect's mosques and seminaries – the second one could have been linked to the widening fight among rival Shiite groups vying for control of the city in the wake of the redeployment outside Basra of British troops. News of the attacks in Basra came as a public tussle between Shiite Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and the country's Sunni Arab vice president, Tariq al-Hashemi, grew more intense. Al-Hashemi's office said in a statement Sunday that he asked President Jalal Talabani to push parliament to pardon security detainees who aren't what he called "dangerous elements" that would rejoin the insurgency. Al-Hashemi has campaigned for the release of thousands of detainees held in Iraqi and U.S.-run detention facilities without charge. He appeared to be trying to bypass al-Maliki in the appeal.

Nearly 90 percent of the estimated 25,000 Iraqis held by the U.S. military are believed to be members of the once-dominant Sunni Arab minority, a fact that Sunni politicians say is evidence of sectarian policies of the Shiite-dominated government. Petraeus also offered some personal reflection on the plight of Sultan Hashim al-Tai, who faces the death penalty after his conviction for his role in a Saddam Hussein-era military campaign that killed tens of thousands of Kurds. Al-Tai and the two other defendants – Saddam's cousin "Chemical Ali" al-Majid and Hussein Rashid Mohammed, former deputy operations director for the Iraqi military – were convicted in June of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity for their part in the 1986-88 crackdown. They were sentenced to death by hanging. But the executions have been delayed as Iraqi politicians wrangle over the refusal of Jalal Talabani, himself a Kurd, to sign the order, as required by the constitution. Some legal experts have argued the requirement did not apply to former regime officials.

Al-Tai, a Sunni Arab from the northern city of Mosul, negotiated the cease-fire that ended the 1991 Gulf war, when a U.S.-led coalition drove Iraqi forces from Kuwait. He also surrendered to U.S. forces in September 2003 after weeks of negotiations. His defense lawyers claimed the Americans had promised al-Tai "protection and good treatment" before he turned himself in. Petraeus, who was then commander of the 101st Airborne division that oversaw the surrender, denied he had promised al-Tai immunity. "We put the word out to his family through interlocutors that you know I would receive his surrender in an honorable manner and convey him to the central authorities and that's basically what we did. And I did treat him honorably." Petraeus said they brought al-Tai's family to him for a "final farewell." The commander also recalled that he personally flew al-Tai in his helicopter to Mosul and spent about an hour with him as they waited for a C-130 transport plane to fly him to Baghdad. "But the bottom line is that if the appropriate Iraqi process is followed then we will respect that process," he said, adding that the three men remained in U.S. custody.

Coalition Forces In Iraq Capture Extremist Splinter Group Leader

Source: KUNA, 27 Oct 07

Coalition forces captured a senior militia extremist, killed two others and detained an additional 14 admitted criminals during operations in the village of al Fawwaliyah, northwest of Khalis early Saturday, according to the Multi-National Force (MNF).

In a statement, it said the operation was "targeting a splinter group leader, who was not honoring Muqtada Al-Sadr's pledge to cease attacks and who was involved in weapons procurement, kidnapping operations and explosively formed penetrator attacks against coalition forces. Intelligence indicates that this individual also has ties to an Iranian intelligence cell." It said that as the

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assault force approached the building where the criminals were believed to be housed, they called for the occupants to exit the building. Two armed men with weapons and hand grenades maneuvered on the assault force, one of whom was wearing a suicide vest. Coalition forces engaged, killing the two men after they failed to comply with instructions and warning shots. Upon securing the area, the main target of the raid identified himself and peacefully surrendered to the ground force.

Inside the building, Coalition forces discovered several automatic weapons, a sniper rifle, maps and ammunition magazines. The area was further assessed to be a substantial militia extremists' compound used to coordinate criminal activity in the area. An additional 14 admitted criminals were detained on site. "We continue to support the Government of Iraq in welcoming the commitment by Muqtada al-Sadr to stop attacks and we will continue to show restraint in dealing with those who honor his pledge," said Major Winfield Danielson, MNF-I spokesman. "Those who have honored his pledge have made a positive impact, reducing violence levels in Iraq. However, as this operation illustrates, not all are honoring his pledge and some continue to conduct violent crimes against Iraqi citizens and security forces. Coalition forces will continue to take the necessary action against these criminals to protect the Iraqi people from their violent actions," he concluded.

President Of Iraqi Kurd Region Urges End To Rebellion

Source: Agency Focus Daily, in Bulgarian 25 October 07 - Translated by Cubic Translation Service

The president of Iraq's northern Kurd region urged the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party to end its more than two-decade armed fighting against Turkey.

According to a tough worded four-point statement, issued by the office of Massud Barzani, the President of the autonomous Kurd region of Iraq declared, "We call upon the PKK to eliminate violence and armed struggle as a mode of operation. We do not accept in any way, in accordance with our commitment to the Iraqi constitution, the use of Iraqi territories, including the territories of the Kurdistan region, as a base to threaten the security of neighbouring countries."

Israel

Israel Cuts Gaza Fuel In Response To Rocket Fire

Source: Reuters, 28 Oct 07

Israel began reducing fuel supplies to the Gaza Strip on Sunday under new economic sanctions to punish the Hamas-controlled Palestinian enclave for rocket fire on Israeli towns.

"In line with the Israeli government's decision, the Defense Ministry will this week begin cutting fuel supplies to the Gaza Strip by between 5 and 11 percent, depending on the type of fuel," an Israeli security source said. Palestinian officials had already complained on Sunday that deliveries of fuel oil for Gaza's power station, as well as diesel and petrol, were cut by between a quarter and a half. There was no immediate obvious impact on electricity supply. An official from the European Union, which funds fuel oil to Gaza's only electricity generating plant, said deliveries to the plant were down by about a quarter but it had stocks for some seven days of

operation. Power demand tends to ease at this time of year, as air conditioning use decreases. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has said he will not allow a "humanitarian crisis". Officials say Israel will take care to ensure supplies for medical and other vital facilities in Gaza, which last month it declared to be an "enemy entity".

Hamas, the Islamist group whose violent seizure of control in the territory in June triggered a virtual closure of its borders, condemned Israel's "blackmail". "The ... bid to strangle the Palestinian people will create an explosion that will blow up not only in the face of Hamas but affect the entire region," Hamas spokesman Faze Barroom said. Under pressure to act against rocket attacks at a time when the government is also being criticized for talking peace with Hamas's Palestinian rivals in the west Bank, Defense Minister Ehud Barak last week ordered gradual cuts in energy supplies. Makeshift rockets have killed two Israelis this year. The United Nations has cautioned Israel against imposing "collective punishment" on Gaza's 1.5 million people. Israeli officials said the government was still reviewing its legal position -- Palestinians argue that, as Israel continues to control Gaza's frontiers since withdrawing troops in 2005, it still has the obligations of an occupying power under international law to ensure the welfare of the population.

An Israeli court is reviewing the sanctions, the security source said. He added that Israel had closed the Sufa crossing point, one of the few passages for goods since the main cargo clearing terminal was closed when Hamas seized power. The Palestinian Authority led by President Mahmoud Abbas in the larger west Bank, which has cut off relations with Hamas, has called on the international community to intervene to protect the civilian population of the Gaza Strip. An association for fuel merchants in Gaza said only about half the day's deliveries of petrol and diesel had been made. Mojahed Salama, head of the Palestinian Authority's Petrol Agency based in the West Bank, said Sunday fuel imports showed a 40 to 50 percent reduction in diesel and petrol supplies and a 12 percent reduction in fuel for the power plant in Gaza. A spokesman at Israeli fuel supply firm Dor Alon said it was implementing orders received from the Defense Ministry.

Abbas: Hamas Planning west Bank Takeover

Source: Jerusalem Post, 29 October

Hamas is planning to overthrow the Palestinian Authority government in the west Bank with the help of external forces, PA President Mahmoud Abbas said Sunday. Meanwhile, Fatah officials in Ramallah revealed that some Hamas leaders had received financial aid from former PA chairman Yasser Arafat. Documents released by the officials showed that the Hamas leaders had received thousands of dollars from Arafat in the 1990s. "We have information that Hamas is planning to copy the Gaza coup in the west Bank," Abbas said. "It's no secret that international parties are supporting Hamas in its efforts." Although Abbas did not name the international parties, his aides told The Jerusalem Post he was referring to Iran, Syria and Qatar. Abbas expressed confidence that Hamas's plan would fail. He also expressed readiness to resume talks with Hamas after the Islamist movement relinquishes control over the Gaza Strip. "Hamas is an integral part of the Palestinian people and we are prepared to talk to them if they cede control over the Gaza Strip," Abbas said. "But we know that Hamas can't make decisions on its own because of political and economic pressure from outside forces."

Abbas said Hamas was talking with Israel. He said that although he was not opposed to such talks, Hamas leaders must openly admit that they were talking to Israel. Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum denied that his movement was planning to stage a coup against Abbas's government. He said the charges were aimed at covering up for the "crimes" committed by Abbas's "militias" against Hamas supporters and figures in the west Bank. Barhoum said Hamas was "forced to take security measures in the Gaza Strip to stop Abbas's forces from carrying out the Zionist-American plot

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to overthrow the democratically elected government."

Fatah spokesman Ahmed Abdel Rahman said Sunday that Hamas's "coup" in the Gaza Strip had undermined the Palestinian cause in the international and Arab arenas. He denied that Hamas and Fatah were conducting secret negotiations to end the conflict, but said some Arab and Islamic countries had been mediating between the two parties. Abdel Rahman said there were growing signs the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip were unhappy with the Hamas rule. He said Hamas's actions in the Gaza Strip had alienated many Palestinians, who were publicly criticizing the Hamas government.

The Fatah official, who also serves as an adviser to Abbas, said a PA delegation was expected to visit Damascus soon in a bid to persuade the Syrians to ban a meeting organized by radical Palestinian groups to protest against the upcoming US-sponsored peace conference. According to documents published by Fatah officials, several Hamas members who had formed a new party called the National Islamic Salvation Party received \$50,000 a month from Arafat. The party, which is an offshoot of Hamas, was headed by Yahya Musa, who today serves as a Hamas legislator in the Palestinian Legislative Council. According to the documents, some of Hamas's current leaders and spokesmen had also received \$5,000 each from Arafat. The money was given to them after they wrote letters to Arafat seeking financial aid.

Bomb Detonated Under SUV Of Deposed Gov't Security Personnel

Source: KUNA, 27 Oct 07

Unknown armed men detonated an explosive device early Saturday morning under an SUV belonging to the Palestinian police force of the deposed government, near a police station in the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis.

Witnesses said the blast damaged the vehicle but there was no loss of life. The Interior Ministry of the deposed government said in a statement that the attack was staged by people who had "deviated from the track of law," adding that "any attempt to re-instigate chaos is rejected." Moreover, it said it would not be lenient with "traitors" whom it claimed wanted to destabilize Gaza.

Two Dead In Gaza House Explosion; Medics

Source: Reuters, 27 Oct 07

An explosion ripped through a house in the southern Gaza Strip on Saturday, killing at least two Palestinians, witnesses and medical workers said.

The source of the blast was unclear. An Israeli army spokeswoman said Israel was not involved in the incident. Medics said a young child and a woman were killed and at least three others were wounded. Residents searched through the rubble of the house for other survivors. Witnesses described a loud explosion in a village east of the southern Gaza town of Khan Younis near the border fence with Israel.

Israeli Troops Kill Palestinian Militant In Gaza

Source: Reuters, 26 Oct 07

Israeli troops killed a Palestinian gunman belonging to the Islamic Jihad militant group in the Gaza Strip on Friday, militants and hospital officials said.

An Israeli army spokesman said troops had clashed with militants during routine operations near the southern Gaza town of Khan Younis. Israeli troops frequently conduct raids into the Gaza Strip to try to prevent Palestinian militants from firing short-range rockets into southern Israel.

Israeli Troops Raid Gaza, Kill 6 Militants

Source: Reuters, 26 Oct 07

Israeli troops killed six Palestinian gunmen on Friday in some of the heaviest fighting for weeks in the Gaza Strip, Palestinian medical and militant sources said.

Two Israeli troops were wounded, the army said, as three separate raids were mounted into the territory, backed by air strikes. Seven Palestinian militants and three civilians were wounded, hospital staff said. Fighters from Hamas, the Islamist group which controls Gaza, were joined by other militants in battles that began overnight. The Israeli army, which described the raids as "routine", said its forces pulled back in early afternoon and witnesses said fighting appeared to have ended. On Thursday, Israel said it planned to start cutting power supplies to Gaza in response to almost daily rocket fire on Israeli towns nearby. Explosions and gunfire could be heard throughout Gaza and plumes of smoke billowed from the battle zones, in the north, south and centre of the 45-km (30-mile) strip of coast.

Hamas, which routed forces loyal to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to seize control of the territory in June, said three of its men were killed. Islamic Jihad militants said three of their number also died in the clashes. Hamas said its fighters had overrun a small Israeli position and shot two soldiers. The group showed journalists some Israeli military equipment, some of it bloodstained -- evidence Hamas leaders said of their fighters' successes. As the fighting died down, Abbas met Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in an effort to narrow differences over a possible peace settlement that the United States hopes to push forward at a conference to be held near Washington before the year ends. Hamas's leader in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, dismissed such meetings as "a cover for continued Israeli aggression".

Kenya

Kenyan Paper Urges State To Clarify Over Deportation Of 19 On Terrorism Charges

Source: THE PEOPLE in English 0000 GMT 27 Oct 07

The cat and mouse game over the fate of 19 people who were deported to Ethiopia, Somalia and Guantanamo Bay in Cuba has taken a rather disturbing angle. The fact that the matter is quickly transforming into a hot political tool is an open secret. But it is iniquitous for any person to play around with this matter to gain political mileage. Kenyans and indeed the families of these people deserve to be told nothing but the truth.

On the one hand, the government has been issuing very conflicting statements on the matter which is of grave importance to the families of these 19 individuals. The sequence of events surrounding this issue is also confusing Kenyans and smacks of conspiracy to hide the truth. Recently, President Kibaki appointed a special task force to investigate the alleged deportation after pressure from Muslim leaders. The committee will be chaired by Eng A M H Sharawe, while Ambassador Amina Mohamed will be the secretary. Members include senior Muslim officials in the government. But the Ministry of Immigration and Registration of Persons and the government spokesman Alfred Mutua later emerged and denied that the extradited individuals are Kenyans. Internal Security Minister John Michuki has also added his voice to the issue by denying that the government has sanctioned the deportation of the 19 people on allegation of terrorism. The Human Rights Forum and the National Muslims Leaders Forum has, however, maintained the Kenyans are being held outside the country and has tabled a report with the government to substantiate their claims.

The [opposition] Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) presidential candidate Raila Odinga added a new twist when he published the names of the alleged victims of the deportation in a section of the press. Foreign Affairs Minister Raphael Tuju shocked the country last Thursday [25 October] when he admitted the individuals were indeed deported on grounds that they were a security threat. Whether these individuals are Kenyans or not is an issue the government needs to clarify without giving contradictory statements. It is not right to gamble with the lives of 19 individuals for political expediency.

Ex-Terror Suspect's Case Withdrawn

Source: All Africa / The Nation, Caroline Rwenji & Mark Agutu, 27 Oct 07

The state has withdrawn a case against a former terrorism suspect accused of being in the country illegally.

Mr. Farah Ahmed Hirsi was a happy man yesterday when state counsel Vincent Wihoro entered a nolle prosequi [NOLLE PROSEQUI - An entry made on the record, by which the prosecutor or plaintiff declares that he will proceed no further.], stopping all the charges. Mr. Hirsi had been accused of also giving false information when he applied for a passport. He came into the limelight after an explosion at the Ambassador Hotel building, on Moi Avenue, Nairobi, killing one person and injuring several others. He presented himself to police after learning that he was a suspect.

Through lawyer Ahmednassir Abdulahi, Mr. Hirsi said he believed the charges were meant to save the face of police, who had maintained that he was the main suspect in the blast. In an application, he told the court that the state wanted to withdraw the case so that they could have him deported to Somalia, Ethiopia or Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. He wanted the court to stop his deportation, saying that he is a Kenyan born in Mandera. Mr. Hirsi further accused police of failing to substantiate, or even charge him with, the offences. The trial is an abuse of the court process, he said, adding that he was being prosecuted in bad faith, unfairly and maliciously. "There is no valid reason for the police to say they need my client in their investigations into the blast yet they are charging him on immigration related matters," the lawyer said. Mr. Hirsi had been released on a Sh50,000 cash bail by Nairobi magistrate Stella Muketi, and ordered to report to police every Monday for a month. In another case, local manufacturers were yesterday allowed to join a case challenging the Government's planned economic partnership with the European Union.

Judge Joseph Nyamu of the judicial review division granted an application by the Kenya Association of Manufacturers, through lawyer Ochieng' Oduol, that said it had interests in the matter. The new development came as Mr.

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Justice Nyamu certified the application as urgent and directed that the file be sent to Chief Justice Evan Gicheru to set up a bench of judges to hear the case. The judge also directed the other applicants - the Kenya Small-Scale Farmers Forum and the Kenya Human Rights Commission - to serve all the defendants, named as the Government and the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, with the suit papers to enable them to prepare and file their responses ahead of the hearing on a date to be set by the chief justice. In their application filed on Thursday by lawyer James Orengo, the two lobby groups warn that the EPA trade arrangement will have devastating effects on the economy, equating it to the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the 1980s, which caused an economy downspin through its push for liberalisation.

Niger

Niger Rebels Say Kill 12 Soldiers In Ambush

Source: Reuters, 27 Oct 07

Niger's Tuareg-led rebels said on Saturday they had killed at least 12 soldiers and destroyed two army vehicles in the desert north of the central African country, but the military denied this.

The Niger Movement for Justice (MNJ), which has already killed more than 45 soldiers during an eight-month uprising, said on its web site it carried out the ambush at dawn on Thursday near Touara, in the region of Agadez. The MNJ has not staged any attacks since the start of the Muslim fast of Ramadan last month, during which it had declared a truce. The deputy head of Niger's army, Colonel Garba Maikido, told national radio that only a few soldiers had been lightly injured after a vehicle ran over a mine near the Algerian border.

Maikido was speaking at the presentation of a seizure of 1.1 tonnes of cannabis resin, worth an estimated 7 billion CFA francs (\$15.33 million), captured by an army patrol in the northern region of Air. Soldiers also seized arms, munitions and aircraft fuel. President Mamadou Tandja's government has refused to recognize the MNJ, blaming the violence in northern Niger on bandits and smugglers of arms and drugs. The rebels demand greater regional autonomy and want a larger share of revenues from major uranium mines in the region to be spent on local development. Niger's uranium provides around a quarter of France's electricity and French state-run utility Areva operates mines in the region. Chinese investors hope to start production soon.

Nigeria

Nigerian Rebel Group MEND Claims Oil Kidnap

Source: Reuters, Tom Ashby, 27 Oct 07

A prominent militant group claimed responsibility on Saturday for the kidnapping of six foreign workers from an Italian oil facility off the coast of Nigeria.

The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) gave no reason for Friday's abduction, the second in a week, which underscored the fragility of a peace initiative in the Niger Delta, Africa's biggest oil producing region.

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"MEND carried out the attack. Six oil workers captured," the group said in an e-mail to Reuters from a recognized MEND address. The raid on the Mystras oil production vessel, 53 miles (85 km) offshore and operated by ENI <ENI.MI> unit Saipem and SBM Offshore <SBMO.AS>, cut output by 50,000 barrels per day (bpd) and helped lift oil prices to a record \$92 a barrel on Friday. ENI said the six hostages included Polish, Filipino and Nigerian nationals, but industry sources said some Indians were also among the captives. Attacks by MEND since early last year had already cut Nigerian output by a fifth and forced thousands of foreigners to flee the vast wetlands region in southern Nigeria. MEND had observed a ceasefire since the inauguration of President Umaru Yar'Adua in May, who promised to address armed groups' grievances of poverty and neglect. But it threatened to resume kidnappings and attacks after the arrest last month of one of its leaders, Henry Okah, in Angola on gun running charges.

Kingsley Kuku, secretary of a government committee negotiating with the rebels, told Reuters he was making contact with those responsible for the abduction. "This happened in an area under the control of MEND," he said. "We are reaching out to MEND. We are working on it and we are getting close. When we are through, they should be released within 48 hours." MEND also claimed responsibility for an attack on the offshore EA oilfield last week in which seven workers contracted to Royal Dutch Shell <RDSA.L> were abducted for two days. The EA field, which can pump 115,000 bpd, has been closed since an earlier attack in February 2006. Kuku said MEND fighters had resumed operations because of Okah's detention. He said he feared the group was preparing for a major assault on the world's eighth largest oil exporter.

"From what we are hearing, these are warning strikes. That is what they say. We are worried they are planning something bigger," he told Reuters. MEND has accused Nigeria of being behind Okah's arrest. The Nigerian presidency has said it wants Okah returned to Nigeria to face criminal charges, a position that is not shared by many involved in the peace effort. Nigeria has no extradition treaty with Angola. Kuku said any attempt to bring Okah to Nigeria as a suspected criminal would be counterproductive. "Nigeria should not get involved. Angola should release Okah so our peace process can go on," he said. The government has had regular contacts with several militia leaders over the past few months in the hope of holding a formal peace conference before the end of the year. But militant representatives say they are frustrated with the slow pace of progress and organisation of the talks, and they doubt the sincerity of the government.

Pakistan

Daily Says Swat Violence Result Of Govt's 'Capitulation' To Militants

Source: The News International, 28 Oct 07 "The new FATA?"

The war-like situation that has broken out in Swat, which unnervingly mirrors that of the troubled tribal areas, offers irrefutable evidence of the government's inability to contain the militants' surge from the border region into the county's heartland and its failure to put into action the lessons learnt in the past.

The capturing of eight security personnel by the militants and the beheading of four, whose corpses were later publicly displayed in local markets, is a very disturbing indicator of what the state is up against in Swat. The situation there had been tense for quite a while before the government, which was for all intents and purposes sitting on its hands, finally decided that it needed to take action to halt the growth of extremism.

The problem, similar to the one encountered in the tribal areas, is that

an operation has finally been launched in the region but not before the hold of the militants, under the leadership of Maulana Fazlullah, has grown manifold, thanks to the government's previous inaction. Fazlullah was allowed to operate with an absurd amount of freedom, spreading his ideology of hate while raising his own standing army which, reports suggest, consists of almost 5,000 men and is tactically organised to a point where there is a separate cell of 'elite' fighters called the 'Shaheen Commando Force'. There is no way that the government can take the route of ignorance in this regard because the activities of the militant maulana were brazenly open. It is a documented fact that he began operating his own FM radio channel without the required government approval and he also openly challenged the provincial government's polio vaccination campaign in the region, telling his followers to refuse inoculation for their children. Ironically enough, instead of taking swift and robust action against a man that had all the makings of a future thorn in the government's side, the provincial government allowed him to continue operating his illegal channel in exchange for him stopping his action against the polio campaign. whichever way one views this, the bottom line is that it reeks of powerlessness on the part of the authorities; the capitulation in turn only served to embolden the maulana and his horde of militants.

There is no doubting the fact that the operation is necessary, and is one in which the state needs to come out on top if the rest of the country is to escape the growing tentacles of extremism and Talibanisation. Having said that, though, the fact also is that had this problem in Swat been tackled when it had began, the situation would not have been as grim as it is today. This is precisely what the government also did in the case of Lal Masjid and even, one could argue, in waziristan. Questions also need to be asked about the usefulness of strategies -- which the government now says are a thing of the past -- that sought to actually encourage such elements because they could be used to fight 'jihads' or proxy wars. while one hopes that the authorities are able to clean up the situation in Swat soon, the situation on the ground, with some reports suggesting that help for the militants may be on its way from neighbouring Kohistan district, indicates that the fight could well go on for many weeks or even longer.

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(Pakistan army forces on Sunday killed 10 islamist fighters during a skirmish in the Northwestern part of the country. The battle began on Friday in the Svat valley 180 km North of the city of Peshawar. The valley, a tourist attraction with Buddhist memorials and a temperate climate, is now the operating area for 2500 Pakistani troops.)

Source: Dawn, 28 Oct 07

Secret agencies were involved in violence in Swat and the government should withdraw forces from the Malakand region, said the provincial amir of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam, Senator Maulana Gul Naseeb Khan, on Saturday.

Addressing a public rally in Chakdara, Maulana Naseeb said the Malakand division was a peaceful region but the government and its secret agencies had turned it into a battlefield. Accusing the government of toeing the American agenda, he condemned militants for attacking girls schools and music shops. He claimed that the people involved in bombings were neither jihadis nor good Muslims but were products of government agencies.

Terming the Frontier caretaker government powerless, he said that all powers were being exercised by the federal government. He said the recent incidents in Swat were part of a campaign to defame ulema and the Taliban. He challenged the government to produce foreign militants before the people and said if there was any foreign militant in the area, local people would themselves hand them over to the government. The rally was organised by the Adenzai chapter of the JUI-F and was attended by JUI's tehsil amir Maulana Habibun Nabi, Maulana Gul Rahim and Maulana Bashir Ahmad.

20 Killed In Latest Clashes Between Pakistani Forces, Militants

Source: KUNA, 27 Oct 07

More than 20 persons, including security personnel, were killed and several were wounded in an operation against a local militant commander and his supporters launched Friday in once peaceful lush-green Swat valley in northern frontier province of NWFP, said officials Saturday.

Meanwhile, militants kidnapped 13 security personnel and publicly beheaded four. Fighting resumed between the two sides on Saturday after few hours of ceasefire, security sources told KUNA. They said militants and paramilitary troopers were exchanging heavy fire. They added that militants attacked the house of a local government official and put it on fire. Sources confirmed that more than 20 persons including about a dozen security personnel were killed in fighting and several others were wounded. Forces launched offensive on Friday against local militants commander, Maulana Fazlullah, in Imamdehri village of the valley, a day after about 39 soldiers were killed in a suicide and ammunition explosions. Militancy and extremism is on rise in once peaceful and premier tourist Swat valley since Tahreek Nifaz-e-Shariat Mohammadi (TNSM), Fazlullah's Al-Qaeda linked banned group, established its strongholds in the area.

Despite governments ban on his group and illegal radio station, Fazlullah, also known as Mullah Radio, has been giving fiery anti-government and anti-west speeches on his illegal FM radio station. Meanwhile, militants of TNSM group Friday publicly executed four law-enforcement personnel, all in their mid-20s, in what witnesses described as gruesome and gory scene of beheading by masked militants armed with rocket-propelled grenades and assault rifles. There was no information about the identity of the beheaded men but local newspapers citing witnesses said two of them were from police and the other two belonged to paramilitary force. Police sources said that masked militants Friday evening attacked a security checkpoint in Mangora area of Swat and kidnapped at least 13 security personnel.

wikipedia map showing location of Swat

Militants Execute 13 In volatile NW Pakistan

Source: Reuters, Junaid Khan, 27 Oct 07

Militants in northwestern Pakistan executed 13 people, including six members of the security forces, in apparent retaliation for a crackdown on their stronghold, an official and residents said on Saturday.

The Swat valley in the North West Frontier Province was the scene of a fierce battle between the security forces and followers of a radical Muslim cleric on Friday after authorities sent more than 2,000 soldiers to counter growing militancy. At least 17 paramilitary soldiers and four civilians were killed in a suspected suicide attack near the valley's main town of Mingora on Thursday. Provincial officials said the militants on Friday killed seven civilians outside nearby Matta town, and beheaded three soldiers and three policemen they had taken hostage.

"(The civilians) were travelling in a van. The militants took them out of the van and slaughtered them," Badshah Gul Wazir, a top provincial home ministry official, told Reuters. The corpses of the slain police and soldiers were found in the same area. "All six of them have been found beheaded," he added. He said two civilians were killed in the crossfire. Residents said there had been sporadic exchange of fire between the security forces and militants in Swat on Saturday but there were no reports of casualties. Swat, a scenic valley close to Pakistan's lawless tribal belt bordering Afghanistan, has seen a surge in militant activity since Maulana Fazlullah, a pro-Taliban cleric, reportedly launched an illegal FM radio station and urged people to join a jihad or Muslim holy war. Fazlullah is de facto head of a pro-Taliban group, Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) or Movement for the Implementation of Mohammad's Sharia Law, which was banned by U.S. ally President Pervez Musharraf in January 2002.

Muslim Khan, an aide to Fazlullah, denounced the executions. "Someone may have done it out of emotion but we condemn it," he told a group of reporters. Militants have attacked security forces and carried out bomb attacks in recent months in Swat where they have been forcing residents to follow a strict Islamic code. Pakistani tribal areas have been a hotbed of support for al Qaeda and Taliban militants who have fled Afghanistan. Thousands of soldiers and militants have died in battles in these regions since 2003. Violence has escalated across Pakistan since July, when militants scrapped a peace deal and the army stormed a radical mosque in the capital, Islamabad. Last week, at least 139 people were killed in a suicide attack in the city of Karachi during a procession led by former prime minister Benazir Bhutto on her return from eight years of self-imposed exile.

Russia

Attack On Tyumen-Baku Passenger Train In Russia

Source: Azerbaijan News Service, 28 Oct 07

50-60 people armed with cutting facilities attacked passenger train at Artezian station of the Autonomous Republic of Kalmykia.

There was an armed attack to Tumen-Baku passenger train. Nadir Azmammadov, head of press service of Azerbaijani State Railway, informed ANS TV that 50-60 people armed with cutting facilities attacked passenger train at Artezian station of the Autonomous Republic of Kalmykia. 25 people were injured as the result. 4 of them being seriously injured, were placed in Kizlyar hospital. Transport police and soldier, who came to help, are also among injured. The administration of the Azerbaijani State Railway sent a telegram to the administration of the Russian Railways LLC, North-Caucasus Railways and Russia's transport police asking to seriously investigate the incident

Chechen Police Arrest Suspected Rebel

Source: Regnum in Russian 0559 GMT 26 Oct 07

During operational and search measures carried out on the evening of 25 October, the police in Oktyabrskiy district of Groznyy arrested a 31-year-old local resident. According to the law-enforcement agencies, he has been a member of Akmurzayev's bandit group since 2000, the Chechen Interior Ministry told Regnum news agency. A criminal case has been opened under Part 2 of Article 208 (participation in armed resistance or attacks) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi King Chides UK on Terrorism

Source: BBC News, 29 October

Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah has accused Britain of not doing enough to fight international terrorism, which he says could take 20 or 30 years to beat. He was speaking in a BBC interview ahead of a state visit to the UK - the first by a Saudi monarch for 20 years. He also said Britain failed to act on information passed by the Saudis which might have averted terrorist attacks. King Abdullah is expected to arrive in the UK on Monday afternoon; his visit begins formally on Tuesday. In the BBC interview he said the fight against terrorism needed much more effort by countries such as Britain and that al-Qaeda continued to be a big problem for his country. BBC world affairs correspondent John Simpson says King Abdullah is annoyed that the rest of the world has largely failed to act on his proposal for a UN clearing house for information about terrorism.

Terror 'information'

Speaking through an interpreter, the Saudi monarch said he believed most countries were not taking the issue seriously, "including, unfortunately, Great Britain". "We have sent information to Great Britain before the terrorist attacks in Britain but unfortunately no action was taken. And it may have been able to maybe avert the tragedy." The Saudi leadership maintains that it passed the UK information that might have averted the London bombings of 2005 if it had been acted on. BBC security correspondent Frank Gardner says Whitehall officials have strenuously denied this, and a subsequent investigation by Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) found no evidence of any intelligence passed on by the Saudis that could have prevented the 7 July 2005 bombings. The king's visit has provoked controversy over Britain's relationship with Saudi Arabia. A demonstration is planned outside the Saudi embassy in London later in the week in protest at the country's human rights record. And acting Liberal Democrat leader Vince Cable has announced he is boycotting the visit, citing the corruption scandal over Al Yamamah arms deal, and the Saudis' human rights record.