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Conflict in Yemen

Posted 12 January 2010 by Linda Bouzembrak under Op-Eds

Until 1990, Yemen was a divided country between the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen). The two states unified in 1990 after decades of conflict. However, as of today, Yemen faces three separate crises:

- the newly intensified Huthis rebellion in the north
- the increasingly violent secession movement in the south
- Al-Qaeda fighters from Saudi Arabia who found refuge in Yemen

1. Huthis rebellion

Shia Huthis rebels have been fighting the Yemeni army since 2004 in the north of the country over alleged governmental discrimination, aggression and marginalization. The conflict intensified in August 2009 when the Yemen's army launched military operation against the Huthis. In addition, Saudi Arabia recently launched a military operation against the Huthis on its border with Yemen, as combats have increased in this region. Consequently, Huthis rebels have accused Saudi Arabia of supporting the central government campaign against them, an accusation that Riyadh denied.

Besides, the Yemeni government accuses Iran of supplying the Huthis insurgents to create a Shia arc around the Middle East; an accusation that Tehran and Huthis leader denied.

As a result of the on going fighting in the north of Yemen since 2004, aids groups think that at least 150,000 people have fled their homes and many have been wounded or killed during combats.

2. Secession movement in the south

Separatist movements in the south have gained momentum and have recently grown more violent. Since last April, south Yemen has been engulfed in violence. Separatist groups want to secede from the north on the ground of political marginalization by the central government and economic disparities between north and south.

3. Al Qaeda

Early last year, Nasser al Wuhayshi, Osama bin Laden's former secretary, announced the merger of the Saudi and Yemeni branches of Al Qaeda, raising the alarm of

counterterrorist agencies in the United States and elsewhere, which fear that Yemen may become a terrorist safe heaven. In July 2009, General David Petraeus, the top U.S. military commander visited Yemen to push the government to implement aggressive actions against Al Qaeda. However, it appears that Al Qaeda remains of a third concerns for the Yemeni government given the threat posed by the Huthis rebellion and secession movements in the south.

TAGS: [Yemen](#)

Muslims Speak Out After Christmas Day Bomb Attempt

Posted 12 January 2010 by Linda Bouzembrak under [Op-Eds](#)

On January 12, the Palestinian-owned daily *Al-Quds al-Arabi* carried the following lead editorial (original source in Arabic, translated into English by [MidEastWire](#)): “The treatment of Muslims in American airports”

The United States of America has adopted stricter security measures in its airports and border passageways, following the uncovering of the failed attempt to detonate a civilian plane over Detroit by a Nigerian young man who was said to have received training in an Al-Qa'idah camp in Yemen. These measures are undoubtedly a sovereign American decision but they are targeting particularly Arab and Muslim citizens, which means that the accusations of “terrorism” have now become limited to those people solely, in a clear reflection of segregation. The American administration drew up a list of terrorist states featuring fourteen countries, thirteen of which are Muslim countries and include Iran, Afghanistan, Libya, Algeria, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Sudan, Syria, Pakistan, Nigeria, Somalia, Iraq and Lebanon.

As for the only non-Arab and non-Muslim country, it was Cuba. The targeting of Arabs and Muslims with thorough searches at American airports is not new. However, the tightening of these measures following the failed detonation attempt will entail further humiliation, investigations, body searches and computer and cell-phone checking, which will render trips to America an unbearable nightmare. Moreover, the fact that an Arab or Muslim citizen holds European nationality does not mean anything, and does not spare the latter from going through the same measures if coming from the states featured on the American lists, whose citizens are believed to be more prone to carry out terrorist attacks.

Therefore, Britons and French (which includes around one million names).

In this context, Libya’s current envoy to the United Nations, and former foreign minister, Mr. Abdelrahman Shalgam, was subjected to humiliating treatment at New York airport before boarding the plane, which prompted his government to protest and decide to prevent the entry of Americans into its territories. However, the apology issued by the

American administration and its secretary of state for this shameful action helped contain the crisis, even if temporarily. However, the most painful example is that in which the American government sent back a French national of Algerian origins from the airport of the capital, Washington, after he was searched in a humiliating way, just because he was not white and his eyes were not blue.

The Algerian government was almost the only one to protest the American decision to subject its citizens to additional security monitoring in airports, believing it was unjustifiable discrimination... We had hoped to see all the other Arab and Islamic states on the American terrorism lists protesting in a collective way and agreeing to adopt similar measures when dealing with the American nationals who reach their airports, by lengthily interrogating them, fiercely searching them and arresting them for long hours, seeing how the Americans are also perpetrating acts of terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan. We are in favor of the protection of innocent American citizens, but also in favor of the protection of Arab and Muslim citizens from humiliation... at the hands of American investigators who despise all that is Arab and Muslim and treat us like convicted terrorists and not like businessmen, students, diplomats or journalists.

TAGS: Middle East,Public Safety,Transnational Security,United States

Google, China, and the rise of the cyberattack

Posted 15 January 2010 by Brianna Lee under Op-Eds

By now, the very public news of Google's threat to end operations in China following the discovery of some very troubling cyberattacks has been well circulated, picked apart, lauded, and analyzed. Free speech advocates who have lambasted the company in the past for ever agreeing to abide by the Chinese government's policy of information filtering are suddenly showering Google with praise. Business analysts are forecasting the impact of such a move on the company's financial prospects. Political pundits are weighing in on the potential effects this would have on U.S.-China relations. In the relatively short history of global Internet business, it's a landmark move. Google (which, I should probably mention, is a former employer of mine) is setting a major precedent for refusing to comply with censorship, particularly with such a formidable government and lucrative market such as China's. This being said, I still have sneaking suspicions that had it not been for the direct security breach against Google's services and increasing requests for further censorship, the company would not be so vocally opposed to the routine content filtering it has participated in since 2006.

Still, it's difficult to overstate the significance of this decision, especially given the morally murky nature of most relationships between Chinese authorities and major Internet players that has served as the status quo over the last decade. Will it have an impact on free speech in China? Probably not much. But Google has taken a stance, which only makes it easier for other companies to start doing the same.

But the flurry of analysis and news reports on the issue has only briefly touched on what I consider to be the larger problem underneath all this: China's growing prowess in the art of the cyberattack. I've expressed my skepticism of doom-and-gloom scenarios of cyberattacks bringing down electrical grids and water supplies before, but breaches of privacy, cyber espionage, and denial-of-service attacks are common and effective. Google's public statement released on Tuesday describes the reach of the attacks that led up to their decision to reconsider working in China: First, this attack was not just on Google. As part of our investigation we have discovered that at least twenty other large companies from a wide range of businesses—including the Internet, finance, technology, media and chemical sectors—have been similarly targeted. We are currently in the process of notifying those companies, and we are also working with the relevant US authorities.

Second, we have evidence to suggest that a primary goal of the attackers was accessing the Gmail accounts of Chinese human rights activists. Based on our investigation to date we believe their attack did not achieve that objective. Only two Gmail accounts appear to have been accessed, and that activity was limited to account information (such as the date the account was created) and subject line, rather than the content of emails themselves.

Third, as part of this investigation but independent of the attack on Google, we have discovered that the accounts of dozens of U.S.-, China- and Europe-based Gmail users who are advocates of human rights in China appear to have been routinely accessed by third parties. These accounts have not been accessed through any security breach at Google, but most likely via phishing scams or malware placed on the users' computers. Reports have surfaced that Adobe, Northrop Grumman, and Yahoo could have been other victims of similar security breaches as well.

True, there is no hard evidence to prove that these recent attacks were caused by Chinese governmental authorities themselves (although nobody is shy in suspecting as much). Concerns over China's increasing expertise in cyberattacks – especially in probing other countries' networks – is not new. Last October, the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission released a report entitled "Capability of the People's Republic of China to Conduct Cyber Warfare and Computer Network Exploitation." Part of the report notes:

General James Cartwright, while serving as the Combatant Commander of US Strategic Command, testified before a Congressional commission that China is actively engaging in cyber reconnaissance by probing the computer networks of U.S. government agencies as well as private companies. He further noted that the intelligence collected from these computer reconnaissance campaigns can be used for myriad purposes, including identifying weak points in the networks, understanding how leaders in the United States think, discovering the communication patterns of American government agencies and private companies, and attaining valuable information stored throughout the networks.

A review of the scale, focus, and complexity of the overall campaign directed against the United States and, increasingly, a host of other countries around the world strongly suggest that these operations are state-sponsored or supported.

The report goes on to detail the level of sophistication reached by the PLA's efforts to build their information networks and exploit that of others.

Simply put, China's use of cyber attacks has reached such a problematic point that even a major company like Google sits up and sounds the alarm to the point of threatening to pull out entirely. The silent discomfort between U.S. and China over the consistent probing of American networks may finally break into vocal protest.

TAGS: [China](#), [Internet Regulation](#)

This Just In...

Posted 22 January 2010 by Dan Logue under [Op-Eds](#)

It appears that bribery and corruption in Afghanistan are much more widespread than I had originally believed. While watching The Dylan Ratigan Show on MSNBC, a UN report mentioned shed light on the problem plaguing Afghanistan today.

According to the UN's Office of Drugs and Crime, Afghanistan spends **US\$2.5 BILLION** each year on bribery and corruption. That amounts to approximately 23% of Afghanistan's GDP. That's right — nearly one quarter of the money spent in Afghanistan goes to "greasing the wheels" and paying off corrupt officials. As has been reported previously, some of these government officials are incredibly high up, including President Karzai's own brother.

This makes bribery and corruption the second largest portion of the Afghani economy, after the opium poppy cash crop. Nearly US\$3 billion (according to the UN, US\$2.8 billion) are spent each year in the opium poppy industry.

It is extremely sad to think that nearly 50% of the Afghani economy is either related to the opium trade or bribery/corruption. How can a country effectively run itself when so much money is going into such illicit sectors? Government officials who are personally enriching themselves and failing to provide services simply alienate the general public and create a spiral where people stop paying into the system, thus forcing more officials to resort to bribery. It also hinders needed capital from creating a real economy with opportunities so that people won't need to turn to opium in order to make ends meet.

How can this cycle be broken so that the Afghani population can be finally live in peace and prosperity?

TAGS: [Afghanistan](#), [United Nations](#)

Yemen: The Human Rights Situation

Posted 01 February 2010 by Linda Bouzembrak under [Op-Eds](#)

Human Rights violations:

A recent report by Yemeni human rights organizations presented to the United Nations Committee Against Torture reveals serious human rights violations by the Yemeni National Security Agency against Yemeni jurists and human rights activists. Moreover, Amnesty International recently reported police brutality and torture of detainees held in connection with politically motivated acts or protests. Reported methods of torture included beating with sticks, punching, kicking, prolonged suspension by the wrists or ankles, burning with cigarettes, being stripped naked, denial of food and prompt access to medical help, and threats of sexual abuse. The same report also indicates sentences of flogging being frequently carried out after being handed down by the courts for sexual abuses and alcohol offences. In addition, several protesters were reported to be killed as a result of excessive use of force by the security forces during peaceful protests. However, no independent investigations have been carried out.

Furthermore, a recent Human Rights Watch [report](#) includes allegations of serious violations of the laws of war by governmental and Huthis forces, including the use of children under 18 in combat, use of anti-personal landmines in civilian areas, and taking civilians hostage. Additionally, the same report reveals allegation of aerial bombing and artillery shelling on populated villages by governmental forces.

Gender-specific issues:

Women in Yemen face violence and discrimination on a regular basis. For instance, women are not free to marry who they want and some children as young as eight are forced to marry. Furthermore, once married, women must obey their husbands and even obtain permission to leave the house. In regards to the law, women's testimony in court is valued only as half as that of men. Women are also denied equal treatment in terms of inheritance, if not completely denied. Moreover, the courts treat men leniently with regards to honor killings.

Amnesty International [reports](#) that violence against women is common in Yemen, perpetrated by the state, the community and the family, and no specific law protects women from domestic violence. Meanwhile, social norms allow men to hit their wives, daughters and sisters. Moreover, visible proof of domestic violence usually needs to be shown before the authorities, but women are often blamed for causing it.

The Refugee Situation:

As of mid-November 2009, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) [estimates](#) that 175,000 people have been displaced by the five-year conflict between the authorities and the Huthis tribe that escalated in August 2009. Elderly people, single mothers and children represent the majority of the new arrivals in refugee camps. The latest sudden influx of refugees due to the intensification of the combat is adding more pressure on an already dire situation, and causing overcrowding in camps.

Meanwhile, as of mid-November 2009, the UNCHR is anticipating a continuous influx of internally displaced persons in Yemen.

Additionally, Yemen hosts over 40,000 Somali refugees who survived the hazardous crossing of the Gulf of Aden, where many have drowned or been killed by human traffickers. Moreover, according to a recent report of Amnesty International, some 1,300 asylum-seekers were returned involuntarily to their countries.

TAGS: [Human Rights](#), [Yemen](#)

“Chinese Expansionism” in Kazakhstan?

Posted 02 February 2010 by Florence Au under [Op-Eds](#)

Depends on who you ask. A few days ago several hundred people gathered in the Kazakh city of Almaty to protest against the country’s proposal to lease farmland to China. Interestingly enough, back in December when the media leaked reports of this news to the public, the Kazakh Prosecutor-General’s Office led an investigation to rule on whether the leak “incited national enmity and hatred,” no doubt in an attempt to hush the growing dissent surrounding this issue. At that time, the officials said that this was not a farmland lease, but a “joint agricultural manufacture.”

Now that the proposal is public, the many sides of this controversy are beginning to take shape. Despite the many economic ties that the two countries have forged in the last few years (the “silk road” pipeline, Chinese investment in Kazakh oil companies), many issues still remain. Kazakhstan wants foreign investors to pour money into its agricultural sector and is willing to provide up to 3.5 million hectares of land, of which 1 million has recently been leased by China. China benefits from this deal because the farmland is suitable for growing soybeans, which constitute a large part of animal feed. Inevitably, the use of farmland by the Chinese means that there will be migration into Kazakhstan and therefore intensify the clash of cultures. Given that there are many ethnic Uighurs scattered throughout Kazakhstan, and given the Chinese government’s tumultuous record with this group in the Xinjiang province, it is no surprise that some people in Kazakhstan feel threatened by this so-called “expansionism.” As they see it, this is not simply a lease of land from one country to another, but a threat of exploitation and expansion against the context of increasing ethnic tensions between the Chinese and its immediate neighbours. The choice that the Kazakhstan government has made is a tough one — we can only wait and see if the benefits exceed the costs.

TAGS: [Central Asia](#), [China](#)

PGI Podcast #1: Media Coverage of the Haiti Earthquake

Posted 11 February 2010 by PGI Editorial Staff under Podcasts

The first episode of PGI's podcast series is now available! It features an interview with **Curtis Brainard** of the Columbia Journalism Review on the media coverage surrounding the devastating earthquake in Haiti last month.

Brainard speaks with Brianna Lee on how the coverage has been so far, the reporter/physician controversy, and the state of local Haitian media in the quake's aftermath.

(If you cannot see the mp3 player above, you can download the podcast here: <http://www.pgi.nyc/archive/podcasts/CurtisBrainard.mp3>)

By PGI Editorial Staff

TAGS: Podcast

The Offensive Begins...

Posted 14 February 2010 by Dan Logue under Op-Eds

It's official: the U.S. military, led by the Marines, have ramped up a new offensive in Afghanistan in order to make the country more secure. Helmand Province in southern Afghanistan, near Kandahar, is the locus of this new offensive. Long a Taliban stronghold, the south of the country has been the most risky and least secure area for American and coalition forces.

Initially, the Marines and NATO troops met little to no resistance; what remains to be seen is the Taliban strategy. Are they on the run, or is this a strategic move to lure troops into a more difficult/dangerous place to fight?

This fight is just beginning, and no doubt will have many twists and turns along the way. But this is part of President Obama's plan to finally secure Afghanistan and start the process of giving the country back to its people.

Personally, I'm not sure how this will all work out, for obvious reasons. Military maneuvers do not necessarily create political solutions. There are still questions about how Afghans feel about our presence and new offensive. Plus, logistically there are numerous issues in creating a new society.

None of this touches on the major problems of corruption and drug trafficking, which are still weighing very heavily on Afghan society. Marines, stealth bombers and heavy artillery aren't made to solve these types of problems. Hopefully, they can provide some "breathing space" needed to push the government forward and force it to make much needed changes.

To all those fighting for this cause, good luck and Godspeed. With any luck and some very talented people leading the charge, this could be the beginning of a new era.

For additional information on Afghanistan:

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/35369975/ns/world_news-south_and_central_asia/

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/35387923/ns/world_news-the_new_york_times/

<http://www.newsweek.com/ID/232825>

Photo attributed to: [NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan](#)

TAGS: [Afghanistan](#), [NATO](#), [Transnational Security](#), [United States](#)

The Turning Tide

Posted 22 February 2010 by Brianna Lee under [Op-Eds](#)

Last month I complained, far too prematurely, that in the wake of revelations about Chinese cyberattacks against Google services, international rhetoric was largely ignoring the insidious underlying signals about the dangers of Chinese cybermilitary prowess. Since then, of course, news outlets have seen a deluge of commentary about the next “digital war,” enhanced by follow-up investigations into the Google attacks, as well as Hilary Clinton’s [speech](#) last month on Internet security. The general consensus seems to consistently boil down to two points: a) The world is speeding towards a trend in digital, highly networked warfare, and b) The U.S. is not nearly as prepared for this as it should be.

This is not a new criticism. But even if you take out the digital aspect of this new tide in warfare, criticisms against the U.S.’s approach to security operations and conflict still seem to suggest that the American military is slow to adapt. We still have the latest technology, the biggest guns, and thousands of nuclear warheads that can destroy that world several times over. Yet, in the “War Issue” of Foreign Policy magazine released just today, a [commentary](#) on the U.S.’s lack of understanding of networking stings:

“...the United States is spending huge amounts of money in ways that are actually making Americans less secure, not only against irregular insurgents, but also against smart countries building different sorts of militaries. And the problem goes well beyond weapons and other high-tech items. What’s missing most of all from the U.S. military’s arsenal is a deep understanding of networking, the loose but lively interconnection between people that creates and brings a new kind of collective intelligence, power, and purpose to bear — for good and ill.

Civil society movements around the world have taken to networking in ways that have done far more to advance the cause of freedom than the U.S. military’s problematic efforts to bring democracy to Iraq and Afghanistan at gunpoint. As for “uncivil society,” terrorists and transnational criminals have embraced connectivity to coordinate global operations in ways that simply were not possible in the past. Before the Internet and the World Wide Web, a terrorist network operating cohesively in more than 60 countries could not have

existed. Today, a world full of Umar Farouk Abdulmutallabs awaits — and not all of them will fail.”

The rest of the issue looks to be an intriguing read on the shifting tides in modern war. But perhaps even this one critique is myopic still. Unrestricted Warfare, a 1999 best-selling book in China and a heavy influence on the People’s Liberation Army, advocated this approach to war in the modern age:

“War which has undergone the changes of modern technology and the market system will be launched even more in atypical forms. In other words, while we are seeing a relative reduction in military violence, at the same time we definitely are seeing an increase in political, economic, and technological violence. However, regardless of the form the violence takes, war is war, and a change in the external appearance does not keep any war from abiding by the principles of war.

If we acknowledge that the new principles of war are no longer ‘using armed force to compel the enemy to submit to one’s will,’ but rather are ‘using all means, including armed force or non-armed force, military and non-military, and lethal and non-lethal means to compel the enemy to accept one’s interests.’”

Perhaps this is what we really should be preparing for.

Photo Attributed to: Chris Roberts

TAGS: Cyber warfare, Transnational Security

Turkey: Regional hegemony in the Middle East?

Posted 23 February 2010 by Linda Bouzembrak under Op-Eds

Turkey enjoys a privileged geographical position, at crossroads between South-East Asia, Europe and the Middle East, which she has been able over the past decade to translate into geopolitical advantages¹. In regards to her economy, Turkey is the world’s seventeenth largest economy, Europe’s sixth largest economy², and from 2005 to 2008 she doubled her trade exchange with her eight nearest geographical neighbors, which encompasses countries such as Syria, Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan and Georgia³. Turkey is also growing as an energetic corridor, with the Baku-Ceyhan gas pipeline and the oil pipelines from Iraq and Iran, in addition to becoming an exporter of water to other regional states, such as Libya⁴. Moreover, Turkish tourism is booming and the number of Arab and Persian tourists to Turkey has multiplied over the past few years, while Arab television channel are buying in large number Turkish television series, which are very popular among Arab viewers⁵.

In regards to military capabilities, as commonly known Turkey has the second largest army in NATO⁶. However, what is less known is Turkey current military upgrade, such as already having the second largest inventory of F-16 fighters in the world and the recent acquisition of modern frigates and submarines to update its Navy traditionally viewed as

poor⁷. Moreover, Turkey has been developing domestic military building capabilities that make her independent from foreign suppliers⁸, such as the United States or Israel.

Besides, Turkey started playing an instrumental role in the Israel-Palestinian conflict, by mediating direct talks between Syria and Israel, diffusing tensions between Lebanon and Israel and holding talks with Saudi-Arabia on the matter.

Turkish military recent upgrade trend, combined with strong economic ties to the Middle East region and her active participation in the Israel-Palestinian conflict clearly indicate a desire to become a regional hegemon.

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6. (Erickson , 2004, p.34)
- 7.Ibid
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Photo attributed to: Jorge Láscar

TAGS: Middle East,NATO,Turkey