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Terrorism/Usama bin Ladin: Who's Chasing Whom? (C)

Since his alleged expulsion from Sudan in May, terrorist financier Usama bin Ladin has reportedly been traveling familiar routes to secure a new haven. Bin Ladin's willingness to issue recent public anti-western threats hardly fits the image of a man running scared; he may have played a role in the June Khobar Towers bombing. (S/NF [EX] 1.4 (c))

Elvis's competition

Since mid-May denaturalized Saudi radical dissident Usama bin Ladin has reportedly been sighted in the UK, Yemen, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Sudan. Bin-Ladin's many passports - and private plane - allow him considerable freedom to travel with little fear of being intercepted or tracked. His financial network includes a number of small "front companies" and associates located in several states; his interest in supporting radical Islamists extends well beyond the Middle East. (S/NF)

Though we cannot confirm bin Ladin's permanent departure from Sudan, he appeared inclined to seek a more hospitable location even before Khartoum became anxious to prove it had cut its ties to terrorists. Bin Ladin's National Islamic Front colleagues probably would have wanted an amicable separation, in part because Khartoum did not want to alienate the radical terrorist financier and his small army of trained mujahidin. Any arrangement may have included allowing bin Ladin to run his Khartoum-based businesses through Sudanese intermediaries. (S/NF)

Bin Ladin's homecoming

Bin Ladin would feel comfortable returning to Afghanistan, where he got his start as a patron and mujahid during the war with the former Soviet Union. With the April reconciliation between nominal President Rabbani and Islamic militant leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Afghanistan has become an even more desirable location for extremists. Afghanistan may be an ideal haven as long as bin Ladin can continue to run his businesses and financial networks. His prolonged stay in Afghanistan -

where hundreds of "Arab mujahidin" receive terrorist training and key extremist leaders often congregate - could prove more dangerous to US interests in the long run than his three-year liaison with Khartoum. (S/NF)

Posturing or planning?

Recent press interviews with bin Ladin, alleged to have taken place in London and then Afghanistan, reveal an increasingly confident militant leader. Though bin Ladin's warnings to the UK and France to leave Saudi Arabia lest they face the same fate as the United States may be mere bluster, they could foreshadow future support for terrorist attacks against UK and French interests. [1.4 (c) (d)]

French officials who believe bin Ladin supported Algerian Armed Islamic Group members involved in the 1995 bombings in France may fear he will renew such efforts. (S/NF)

On the run?

Bin Ladin and his associates - particularly Saudi Sunni "mujahidin" - remain suspects in both the November 1995 OPM/SANG bombing and the Khobar Towers attack. [1.4 (c) (d)]

[We cannot confirm his involvement in either bombing. (S/NF [EX] 1.4 (c))]

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With pressure against him mounting from the United States and some Muslim states, especially Saudi Arabia and Egypt, bin Ladin seemingly should be on the run. But his willingness to speak more openly to the press about his militant opposition to the Saudi regime and the West suggests more a man emboldened by recent events, whether or not he was involved in them. He may believe tensions in Saudi Arabia are ripe for exploiting through increased terrorism. (S/NF)

Keeping bin Ladin on the move by reducing his haven options will inconvenience him, but his informal and transnational network of businesses and associates will remain resilient. Even a bin Ladin on the move can retain the capability to support individuals and groups who have the motive and wherewithal to attack US interests almost worldwide. (S/NF)

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held IFOR's aggressive military inspections partly responsible for the standoff at Han Pijesak. The Bosnian Serbs may take greater care in their attempts to hide unreported weapons, but are unlikely to be deterred from such activity. (S)

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(For related information, see Analysis page 4.)

Sudan: Bin Ladin's Deal (S)

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in early May agreed to the expulsion of terrorist financier Usama bin Ladin on the condition that in the future he be allowed to return.

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hoped that when bin Ladin visited he would use false documentation and provincial airports, such as Port Sudan or Kassala, to avoid publicity. (S/NF)

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Comment: [] probably acceded to bin Ladin's departure to alleviate international pressure and avert further UN sanctions for Khartoum's support for terrorism, but he did not want his hard-line Islamist allies to view him as "caving in" to the West. [] also were loath to lose access to bin Ladin's wealth, which has been heavily invested in Sudan. (S/NF)

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Though bin Ladin reportedly has made numerous surreptitious return trips to Sudan from his probable Afghanistan sanctuary, Khartoum probably would not risk a lengthy visit while it engages in a "charm offensive" to normalize relations with the United States and is still under the gun at the UN. The Kassala region increasingly has become a confrontation zone between Eritrean-backed Sudanese opposition elements and NIF forces and thus is not an ideal location for bin Ladin. (S/NF)

(SECRET/NOFORN [1.4(C)])

Belarus: Lukashenko Pressing (U)

President Lukashenko continues to raise the stakes in his campaign to subdue the increasingly independent parliament. (C)

Lukashenko on August 15 told an audience of local officials that he would not allow parliamentary elections to fill 61 vacant seats, saying the legislature "already has enough deputies to do its job." The central electoral commission earlier had scheduled these by-elections for November 24. Lukashenko, who still enjoys considerable popularity, called on the public to support his initiatives in the November 7 referendum, which he said should be a "vote of confidence in the presidency." (C)

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