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A Who's Who of the Insurgency in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province: Part Two – FATA excluding North and South Waziristan

By Rahimullah Yusufzai

The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is the largest organization of Pakistani militants operating in the country's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), which includes the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Launched in a secret meeting on December 13, 2007, it is active in most of the 24 districts, seven tribal agencies and six frontier regions in the province. The militants' strongholds are in South Waziristan, North Waziristan, Orakzai, Kurram, Khyber, Mohmand, Bajaur, and Darra Adamkhel tribal regions and in the settled districts of Swat, Upper Dir, Lower Dir, Bannu, Lakki Marwat, Tank, Peshawar, Dera Ismail Khan, Mardan, Charsadda, and Kohat.

The following is a profile of important Pakistani Taliban commanders active in areas of the NWFP and FATA excluding South Waziristan and North Waziristan, which were covered in an earlier article (see *Terrorism Monitor*, September 22, 2008).

Bajaur Agency

In Bajaur Agency, where Pakistan's armed forces launched an intensive military campaign against militants on August 6, 2008, the mainstream TTP is led by Maulana Faqir Mohammad, a former leader of the banned Islamic group Tanzim



For comments or questions about our publications, please send an email to pubs@jamestown.org, or contact us at:

1111 16th St. NW, Suite #320
Washington, DC • 20036
Tel: (202) 483-8888
Fax: (202) 483-8337

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Nifaz Shariat-i-Mohammadi (TNSM). The group's founder, Maulana Sufi Mohammad, is presently playing an active role in peacefully resolving the two-year-old conflict in Swat district. In 1994, the black-turbaned followers of Maulana Sufi Mohammad (commanded by Maulana Faqir Mohammad) turned to violence in support of their demand for enforcement of Shari'a (Islamic law) in Bajaur and the rest of the Malakand region, including Swat.

Maulana Faqir Mohammad is a resident of Sewai village in Bajaur's Mamond area, a stronghold for the Pakistani Taliban. He belongs to a family of clerics who fought in Afghanistan during the Afghan jihad against the Soviet occupation and later as allies of the Taliban. The TTP in Bajaur is reported to have several thousand fighters and supporters. They put up stiff resistance against the Pakistani security forces but the military campaign has diminished their strength and disrupted their command structure and supply routes to other tribal regions, as well as Afghanistan's Kunar and Nuristan provinces. The TTP managed to establish a Shari'a court in Sewai village with six branches in different parts of Bajaur. The courts were part of the parallel administration that the TTP set up before the military moved in and took tough action against the group. Under heavy pressure from government forces, Maulana Faqir Mohammad's faction declared a unilateral ceasefire on February 24 in order to initiate talks with tribal elders (*Daily Times* [Islamabad], February 25).

Another militant group operating in Bajaur is the Jaish-e-Islami, which parted ways with the TTP in 2008 but now appears to have mended its ties with the TTP in a desperate bid to resist the Pakistan Army's military operation. Led by Waliur Rahman (a.k.a. Raihan), the group consists of militants hailing from the Bajaur village of Damadola. Attacked with laser-guided missiles three times by CIA-operated Predator drones in 2007 and 2008, Damadola enjoys special status with the Islamist movement in Bajaur. Another important figure in the group, which used to have several hundred fighters before the military operation in August 2008, is Maulana Ismail. There were reports that Waliur Rahman had developed some differences with Maulana Faqir Mohammad, but these were apparently not serious in nature and are reported to have been resolved.

Prior to the army's campaign in Bajaur, the Karwan-e-Niamatullah was considered one of the most powerful groups in Bajaur. Led by Haji Niamatullah of the Salarzai area, the group stuck with the TTP despite

having some differences with its policies. At its height, the group had several thousand fighters. It suffered losses when tribesmen from the Salarzai area formed a tribal lashkar (an armed force usually raised with a specific objective), with support from the government and under the leadership of their tribal chiefs. The lashkar started chasing out the militants, who retaliated with suicide bombings, one of which killed scores of their armed rivals, including some tribal elders (Newsline [Karachi], October 2008). The Karwan-i-Niamatullah established its own Shari'a court in Pashat, the main town of the Salarzai area, but the group has since been uprooted from there.

Dr. Ismail (who is not a qualified medical doctor) is another powerful commander in Bajaur. He was affiliated earlier with Pakistan's biggest religious-political party, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) of Maulana Fazlur Rahman, who recently declared that the government has no writ in any part of the NWFP (*Daily Times*, February 20). Dr. Ismail once employed the services of a few hundred fighters until the military struck in Bajaur and pushed his group out of their strongholds. Two young sons of Dr. Ismail were killed in Afghanistan. The TTP considers him and his supporters as part of the organization, but Dr. Ismail is against the TTP's policy of fighting against Pakistan's armed forces. Instead, he wants the Pakistani Taliban and other militants to concentrate on fighting the U.S.-led coalition forces in neighboring Afghanistan.

Maulana Abdullah is another known commander of the militants in Bajaur. He is affiliated with the TTP and has operated mostly in the Charmang and Utmankhel areas of Bajaur. At one time he had a few hundreds fighters at his command. Also operating until recently in the Charmang area was an Afghan Taliban commander named Saeedur Rahman. He seems to have become less active after being warned by the Afghan Taliban to decide whether he wants to fight in Afghanistan or Pakistan.

Mohmand Agency

Two militant groups are known to have operated in Mohmand Agency. One of the groups was evicted after a clash with the TTP cadres in the area. Its commander, Shah Sahib (a.k.a. Shah Khalid), was active in Mohmand Agency for two years until July 2008, when TTP fighters led by Omar Khalid (a.k.a. Abdul Wali) overran his base and killed him and several of his men. Shah Sahib, a known Salafi, did not want to fight the Pakistani state

or its armed forces. From his camp near the Pakistani-Afghan border, Shah Sahib sent his followers to fight in Afghanistan. He had several hundred fighters in his group, which was commonly known in the area as the Ahle Hadith group.

A larger group of militants was led by Omar Khalid (a.k.a. Abdul Wali) and was affiliated with Baitullah Mahsud's TTP. It emerged from obscurity in July 2007, when its fighters captured the shrine of Haji Sahib Turangzai (1858-1937), a social reformer, anti-British freedom-fighter, and religious scholar, in the Lakarro area of Mohmand Agency. Omar Khalid's group renamed the mosque adjacent to the shrine "Lal Masjid" after the radical mosque in Islamabad that was the site of a bloody siege by security forces in July 2007. The group pledged to avenge the killing of Lal Masjid's religious students at the hands of the Pakistan Army and President General Pervez Musharraf. The group extended its control over most of the Mohmand Agency when it publicly slaughtered notorious criminal Yousaf Khan and seven members of the gang and evicted the rival Ahle Hadith militants group of Commander Shah Khalid.

Initially, the shrine of Haji Sahib Turangzai was turned into a base for the militants and a Shari'a court with Afghan scholar Sayyad as the judge was set up. The group had several hundred fighters but its strength was reduced following the military operation in Mohmand Agency in late 2008 and early 2009. Tribal elders from Mohmand recently expressed their support for continuing military operations in the area by the Mohmand Rifles of the paramilitary Frontier Corps (*Daily Times*, February 8).

Darra Adamkhel

There are three groups of Pakistani Taliban operating in Darra Adamkhel, a semi-tribal area known officially as the Frontier Region of Kohat. It has a strategic location due to its position on the main road linking Peshawar to the southern NWFP and beyond via the Kohat Tunnel, which was built by Japanese engineers and opened in 2003. The groups active in Darra Adamkhel are the Tehrik-e-Islami, Islami Taliban, and al-Hezb (see *Terrorism Focus*, February 13, 2008; March 25, 2008).

The Tehrik-e-Islami and the Islami Taliban became active in the area in mid-2007. The former was founded by a local Afridi tribesman named Muneer Khan, while the Islami Taliban was founded by Momin Afridi. The groups later merged and became part of the TTP.

Both leaders were killed in a military operation in the area in 2008. Leadership then passed to Commander Mohammad Tariq, a tribesman hailing from the Bazidkhel Afridi tribe. Another important commander is Mufti Ilyas, a resident of the Sheraki area of Darra Adamkhel. Mufti Ilyas is now deputy to Commander Tariq and acts as a sort of ideologue for the group. Another known commander is Hamza Afridi, who the group's spokesman calls simply Mohammad. Several months ago the group kidnapped a Polish engineer, Petr Stanczak, from the Attock district in Punjab and killed him in February 2009 after the Pakistan government refused to accept a demand for the release of its members (*The News International*, February 15). The group has several hundred fighters under its command. Following the military operation, the militants lost control of the Kohat Tunnel and the Darra bazaar, a gun-manufacturing center for over a century. The leadership has shifted to the adjacent Orakzai Agency, but the group's fighters are still able to occasionally attack security forces in the area.

An obscure group calling itself al-Hezb made its appearance in Darra Adamkhel in late 2008 by distributing pamphlets and leaflets and pasting them in shops. Al-Hezb declared its opposition to the other militant groups and offered an alternative platform. However, al-Hezb never held any public meetings and its leaders are still unknown. In fact, it has even stopped distributing leaflets. Both militants and tribesmen in Darra Adamkhel felt it was part of a trick by the government to confuse the Taliban groups and create differences in their ranks.

Kurram Agency

The TTP, through its regional commander Hakimullah Mahsud, has set up bases in the Lower Kurram valley, which is inhabited by Sunnis, unlike the Upper Kurram valley where the Shi'a are in the majority. Recently, the U.S. carried out its first Predator missile strike in Kurram against an alleged hideout of Afghan Taliban in an Afghan refugee camp. The attack killed at least 26 people, including several militants (*Daily Times*, February 17; *The News International*, February 17).

Orakzai Agency

The TTP has sanctuaries in the Orakzai Agency, a tribal territory with a Sunni majority and Shia minority. Orakzai is the only tribal region in Pakistan that does not border Afghanistan. Hakimullah Mahsud, a young

tribesman from South Waziristan and a deputy to TTP head Baitullah Mahsud, operates out of Oarkzai Agency and is also commander of the militants in the Kurram and Khyber tribal regions. A young man in his late 20s, Hakimullah Mahsud invited the media to his hideout in Orakzai Agency in November 2008 to give his first news conference. This interaction enabled him to emerge from the shadows of Baitullah Mahsud and become known as a commander in his own right (*The News International*, November 29, 2008).

Khyber Agency

Kamran Mustafa Hijrat (a.k.a. Mohammad Yahya Hijrat) was, until a few months ago, the top Taliban commander in the Khyber Agency, which is named after the famous Khyber Pass that serves as a gateway between Central and South Asia and has been the route taken by invaders, conquerors, and traders for centuries. Hijrat was arrested in Peshawar's Hayatabad town in late 2008 and is now in the custody of Pakistan's security services (*The News International*, December 10, 2008).

Hijrat was a deputy to Hakimullah Mahsud and was reportedly responsible for attacks on trucks carrying supplies for NATO forces in Afghanistan. His men also burnt more than 300 vehicles destined for Afghanistan at a terminal for NATO trucks on Peshawar's Ring Road (see *Terrorism Focus*, January 21). Hijrat is an Afghan by birth and was a small-time Afghan Taliban commander before making it big as a member of the Pakistani TTP. His deputy, Rahmanullah, also an Afghan national, has taken over as acting commander of TTP for Khyber Agency.

Several non-Taliban Islamist militant groups are active in Khyber Agency, mostly in the Bara area. These include Mangal Bagh's Lashkar-i-Islam, the late Haji Namdar's Amr Bil Maruf wa Nahi Anil Munkar (Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice), and Ustad Mahbubul Haq's Ansar-ul-Islam (*Newsline*, October 2008).

Rahimullah Yusufzai is Resident Editor of The News International, a daily newspaper in Peshawar.

Assessing the Role of Hezbollah in the Gaza War and Its Regional Impact

By Benedetta Berti

In the aftermath of the recent Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip, there has been an intense debate regarding Hezbollah's non-intervention in the conflict and the reasons behind this strategic decision. However, the group's failure to take part in an armed attack against Israel should not overshadow the importance of the Lebanese organization's non-military contributions to the conflict, in particular its attempt to reframe a reading of the war in line with the Iranian foreign policy agenda for the Middle East.

The Reasons behind the "Non-Intervention Policy"

France's envoy to Syria, Senator Philippe Marini, advanced a possible theory regarding Hezbollah's failure to take action in the midst of the war in Gaza by stating that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad had used his personal influence on the Lebanese group to prevent it from attacking Israel. Senator Marini publicly stated, "President Assad told me he exerted his influence to ensure Hezbollah adopted a responsible attitude and showed restraint during the events in Gaza" (AFP, January 28). However, the report was quickly dismissed by Syrian sources, which denied that President Assad ever referred to Hezbollah in the course of his meeting with the French politician (Syrian Arab News Agency, January 30, 2009).

A different reading of the Lebanese group's posture was found in the pan-Arab, Saudi-owned *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, which—quoting an unidentified "Lebanese source close to Hezbollah"—asserted that the organization was evaluating the possibility of opening a second front against Israel, but was later deterred from doing so. Specifically, the source revealed that Hezbollah let a third party, believed to be the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine–General Command (PFLP-GC), fire rockets against Israel to signal to the Israelis that their northern border was unstable and could explode at any minute. The rockets were also meant to test domestic reaction to a military involvement in the ongoing hostilities between Israel and Hamas (see *Terrorism Focus*, January 15). Accordingly, the negative reaction to the firing of rockets—including within the Shi'a population, which

constitutes the back-bone of Hezbollah's support—along with military calculations finally dissuaded Hezbollah from continuing or escalating the attacks against Israel (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 9). This theory rests on the assumption that Hezbollah has tight control of the entirety of south Lebanon, and thus it seems highly implausible that any organization operating in the area could have fired rockets without the group's knowledge (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 9).

In reality, it is likely that a range of political and military considerations influenced Hezbollah's strategic assessment and its decision to refrain from getting involved in an armed confrontation against Israel. Among the most relevant factors are the upcoming Lebanese elections and the widespread popular opposition to initiating another war against Israel while the nation is still trying to repair the significant damage inflicted on Lebanon's infrastructure in 2006.

Despite the lack of direct military intervention, Hezbollah nevertheless played an important role during the Gaza War. At the outset it is important to say that Hamas and Hezbollah maintained continuous communication in all phases of the conflict. For example, Hezbollah's Secretary-General, Hassan Nasrallah, launched a pan-Arab campaign to bring an end to the embargo on Gaza on December 15, 2009—several days before the expiration of the ceasefire between Hamas and Israel, and only one day after Hamas' political head in Damascus, Khalid Mashal, formally declared the organization's refusal to renew the ceasefire. The timing of these announcements indicates the existence of an open channel of communication between the two groups, as well as a minimum level of inter-organizational coordination (*Daily Star* [Beirut], January 13).

Furthermore, it appears that certain tactics employed by Hamas in the course of the last Israeli military operation in Gaza had been taught to Hamas by Hezbollah; this was confirmed by Hezbollah MP Mohammad Raad (al-Manar, January 2). For instance, since the 2007 Hamas takeover of the Gaza strip, the group has relied more on rocket attacks and less on suicide operations, a change that could be attributed to both observing and applying tactics employed by the Lebanese Hezbollah, as well as to having obtained Iranian versions of the Katyusha and Grad rockets with a longer range (18.6 to 21.7 miles) (AP, December 31, 2008). Moreover, according to Iranian newspaper *Hemayat*, Hezbollah also trained Hamas in military tactics used to attack Merkava tanks (the main battle tank employed by the Israeli Defense Forces) (*Hemayat*, January 5).

However, aside from the pre-existing logistical support and the ongoing communication between the two groups, Hezbollah's concrete contribution to the War in Gaza was at the propaganda and psychological operations level, with the Lebanese group playing an important role in galvanizing and mobilizing the Arab population across the Middle East.

Hezbollah's Media Campaign

Once hostilities commenced, Hezbollah embarked on a massive media campaign to link the War on Gaza and Hamas's response to the 2006 Lebanon War, declaring that the 2006 campaign had in fact marked the beginning of an Israeli military decline within the region. According to Nasrallah:

What is taking place in the Gaza Strip is a Palestinian version of what took place in Lebanon in July 2006," adding that "The Israelis said they learnt lessons from the second war in Lebanon, but it seems that the resistance in Gaza benefited from these lessons more than the Israelis. Actually, the lessons are making the Israelis appear weak and hesitant... they do not even dare to say the goal is stopping the firing of rockets from Gaza. What is the goal then? (...)Why do the Israeli leaders avoid setting a declared goal? They are afraid of failure (al-Manar, December 31, 2008).

Irrespective of the military results on the ground and the substantial blow that Israel inflicted on Hamas, Hezbollah ran a well-planned media campaign to assert the weakness of the Israeli deterrence paradigm. After the Israeli withdrawal, Hezbollah congratulated Hamas "on the victory they have achieved in the face of the Zionists' ruthless aggression against the Gaza Strip" (al-Manar, January 20, 2009).

Hezbollah aimed at reframing the Arab public's understanding of the war in at least two ways; by conveying Israel's weakness vis-à-vis Hamas and the "Resistance," and by suggesting an alternative reading to the war itself. With this objective, Nasrallah stated:

Those who believe that this war is being waged on the Hamas Movement or the Hamas government are mistaken; the war is being waged against the Palestinian people... The contradiction with the Islamic resistance factions in Gaza is not due to their ideological, religious,

or intellectual affiliation. It is, however, due to the program of the resistance... What is being fought in Gaza today is not the Islamic title or the Islamic movement, but what is being fought is the resistance's platform (al-Manar, December 31, 2008).

Nasrallah's analysis of the war aimed at increasing the sense of solidarity and unity of the Arab world, and openly defied the views of Arab regimes such as Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, or the Palestinian Authority itself, which had been critical of Hamas's actions and insisted on its responsibility for the war.

The Confrontation with the "Arab Moderate Regimes"

Hezbollah's reframing of the war in Gaza also allowed the organization to use the ongoing hostilities to chastise the above-mentioned Arab regimes, with Hezbollah's head of international relations Nawaf Mousawi criticizing the "suspicious silence" of Arab leaders, and Secretary General Nasrallah conducting a verbal campaign against Egypt.

In particular, Nasrallah delivered harsh criticism of Egypt for not opening the Rafah Crossing during the Gaza War, and called on the Egyptian people to protest against their government; "Let the Egyptian people take to the streets in the millions. Can the Egyptian police kill millions of Egyptians? No, they cannot" (al-Manar December 28; 2008). Hezbollah's stance against Egypt, backed by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, was rebutted by the Egyptian media, which accused the Shi'a group of being an Iranian front tasked with weakening the Egyptian position as a broker in the Arab-Israeli conflict, in line with Tehran's plans to replace the Arab Republic (al-Manar, January 14, 2009; AFP, December 29, 2008; Al-Arabiya TV, January 30, 2009; *Al-Wafd*, December 30, 2008).

Indeed, Hezbollah's posture regarding Egypt could be read in the framework of Iran's ongoing quest to shift the regional balance of power, thus attempting to weaken Egypt's regional status and the credibility of the Egyptian government. Similarly, Hezbollah also used the Gaza War to issue declarations casting doubts on the role of Saudi Arabia and its peace initiative. In fact, Hezbollah's Shaykh Na'im Qassem strengthened this thesis by stating; "we believe that the [Saudi] initiative was buried after the Gaza war," adding; "as long as Israel exists, it will pose a threat to the entire region" (al-Manar, January 22, 2009).

Conclusion

Despite the lack of direct military involvement, Hezbollah invested substantial political capital in the Gaza War by embarking on a massive media campaign to support Hamas, reframing the entire reading of the conflict and raising the level of political confrontation within the Arab world by attempting to weaken the political position of key moderate Arab regimes, such as Egypt.

Benedetta Berti is the Earhart Doctoral fellow at the Fletcher School, Tufts University, where she is specializing in international security studies and Middle Eastern studies. She is also a graduate researcher at the Jebson Center for Counter Terrorism Studies at Tufts University.

The Return of Shari'a Law to Pakistan's Swat Region

By Mukhtar A. Khan

After 16 months of bitter fighting between local Islamists and government forces in Pakistan's Swat region, the central government has announced the implementation of a set of judicial regulations that will ensure that all legal cases in the region will be decided in accordance with Shari'a law. The "Nizam-e-Adl (Justice System) Regulations 2009" will apply in the Malakand division of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), which includes Swat and the adjoining Kohistan district. The decision to implement the new regulations follows the failure of a major military campaign, Operation Rah-e-Haq (True Path), to contain militants in the region (Geo TV, Islamabad, February 16). In response to the government's decision, the region's leading Islamist, Maulana Sufi Mohammad, has asked the local Taliban to bring a halt to all armed activities and open blocked roads to the military. He has also called for a prisoner exchange, the return of internally displaced persons and the resumption of government and security duties in the Swat region (*Frontier Post*, February 24).

NWFP Chief Minister Ameer Haider Hoti told a press conference that the new Shari'a-based judicial system will be implemented in the war-stricken area following the return of peace and the restoration of the writ of the government. He denied that the system was similar to the one introduced by the Taliban in Afghanistan

(*Dawn* [Karachi], February 17). Hoti stated that the Nizam-e-Adl Regulations were approved by President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani, and lawmakers from the Malakand region following deep consultation with representatives from the Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat Mohammadi (TNSM- Movement for Enforcement of Islamic Law), a banned jihadi organization founded by Maulana Sufi Mohammad in 1988. Sufi Muhammad has long pressed for Islamic law to be restored in Swat. However, Pakistan's Information Minister, Shahrbanou "Sherry" Rahman, declared President Zardari has refused to sign the deal unless peace is restored in Swat, Malakand, and other troubled areas (*Daily Times* [Lahore], February 16). Rahman's statement suggests that criticism from the Western media has unnerved the government of Pakistan over the deal with Taliban. There is a public impression in Pakistan that the government has lost its sovereignty to foreign pressure and cannot legislate freely, even on issues favored by its own people (*The News* [Islamabad], February 17).

Government Hopes for Islamic Law

The deal was welcomed by the local people of Malakand as well as the Taliban in Swat. The local Taliban announced a 10-day ceasefire as a good-will gesture (*Aaj TV* [Islamabad], February 16). However, the deal attracted severe criticism from some secular quarters of Pakistan and the Western media especially. It was alleged that such a deal with the Taliban would further strengthen the militants, giving them time to re-group and attack U.S.-led NATO forces across the border in Afghanistan. It is also feared that the Taliban in other parts of the country, especially the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), will make similar demands for the implementation of a Shari'a-based judicial system. Already, the spokesman of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Maulvi Omar, has requested a similar Islamic system for FATA and the whole of Pakistan (*Daily Mashriq* [Peshawar], February 17).

The government maintains that the new legal code aims only to bring peace and it will have none of the strict Islamic punishments involving whipping or the amputation of hands. Authorities insist this system will provide easy and speedy justice for the people, along with the right of appeal, which was missing from the Afghan Taliban justice system. Under this new system, all civil cases would be resolved within six months and criminal cases would be decided within a maximum of four months. The Nizam-e-Adl Regulation in Swat is, in

fact, a continuation of the semi-Shari'a laws that were in force in the region until its merger with Pakistan in 1969. There was a previous attempt to introduce Nizam-e-Adl regulations in Malakand in 1994 (*The News International*, February 17; *Pashtun Post*, February 17).

Critics have asked one reoccurring question: if Nizam-e-Adl is going to be introduced by the government to respect the will of the local residents, then why were there military operations and bloodshed for more than a year in Swat? During this period, some 1,200 civilians were killed and more than 2,000 wounded. Due to the rising tensions in the Swat Valley, roughly 500,000 people out of the total population of 1.5 million have fled from the region to other places in Pakistan, many of them living in internal refugee camps.

Even before the new regulations come into force, the Taliban has already stamped Swat with its own version of Shari'a. Barber shops and music centers have been closed. Girls' education is banned and more than 300 girls' schools have been set ablaze. The Taliban have warned another 400 plus girls' schools not to open.

The Battle for Shari'a

Maulana Fazlullah, also known as "Mullah Radio" after his fondness for incendiary FM radio broadcasts, is the leader of TNSM and the son-in-law of TNSM founder Maulana Sufi Mohammad. Fazlullah was inspired by Sufi Mohammad and studied the Wahhabi version of Islam at the latter's madrassa based in Dir District. In the wake of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, Fazlullah joined an army of 10,000 young zealots under the leadership of Sufi Mohammad in crossing into Afghanistan to fight against U.S.-led coalition troops. On his return, Maulana Sufi Mohammad was arrested and imprisoned for illegally crossing into Afghanistan. Fazlullah escaped arrest on his return and shifted the TNSM headquarter from Dir to his Swat village of Imam Dherai, exerting his influence in the region by launching an illegal FM radio station in 2006. After that he started gaining control over important parts of Swat and now runs a state within a state (*Daily Mashriq* [Peshawar], November 12, 2008).

Fazlullah has issued *fatwas* (religious decrees) on a regular basis from his illegal FM radio against secular politicians and anyone serving in the military (*Daily Khabrain* [Islamabad], February 12). Once a chair-lift operator, Fazlullah (a.k.a. Fazal Hayat) is now a household name in Swat. His Shaheen Commando

Force is armed with heavy weaponry and ready to carry out his orders to destroy schools, bomb police stations, and target military check-points. One of the busiest business squares in Mingora (Swat's largest town) was known as the Grain Chowk (square), but is now known as "Khooni Chowk" (the Bloody Square) because it has become routine to see dead bodies hanging from poles in that place. The body of Pir Samiullah, a pro-government leader and religious rival to Fazlullah, was among those displayed in Swat's public squares. Pir Samiullah was leading an anti-Taliban lashkar (tribal military force) when the Taliban killed him in a gunbattle and dispersed his lashkar. Several days after the battle the Taliban exhumed his body from the grave and hung it in the same public square where two of his key commanders were executed (*Daily Ausaf* [Muzaffarabad], December 18, 2008; *Dawn* [Karachi], December 16, 2008).

The Legacy of a "Princely State"

Swat was once one of 175 "princely states" of the British-ruled Indian Empire. Control of Swat was turned over to the new Pakistani state in 1947 and the region was eventually annexed to Pakistan in 1969. People in this princely state are more used to personal rule than democracy or any other form of governance. It is believed that Sufi Muhammad and Fazlullah are exploiting this same psychological trait of the local people by developing a personality cult around themselves.

Until recently, Swat was a tourist destination for people all over the world. The beautiful Swat Valley, once known as "the Switzerland of Pakistan," has now been transformed into a battleground between government forces and Fazlullah's Shaheen Commandos, with their motto of "Shari'a ya Shahadat" (Islamic Laws or Martyrdom). So far, Maulana Fazlullah and his militant group have been winning. Since October 2007, they have carried out 165 bomb attacks, including 17 suicide attacks against the security forces, killing more than 190 troops. Due to fears of being killed or kidnapped, some 800 of the region's 1,600 police officials either resigned from their jobs or have left on long leaves (*Daily Jang* [Lahore], February 10). Fazlullah took control of over 80 percent of the Swat area and summoned 41 prominent people, including ministers and parliamentarians, to appear before his Shari'a court to explain themselves. Despite belonging to the ruling parties, most of these politicians have fled the area (*Dawn TV* [Islamabad], January 30).

In the military's three-phase Operation Rah-e-Haq, a force of 12,000 men was unable to subdue a band of 3000 TNSM hardliners. Despite the government's claim that it has brought Swat under its control, Maulana Fazlullah continues to run a private army, along with parallel Shari'a courts, a Shura (consultative council) a Bait-ul-Maal (finance center), and, of course, his illegal FM radio station. The Pakistan government boasted several times during the operation that it had taken control of Swat, but every time it proved to be a mirage (*Frontier Post* [Peshawar], January 29). In the first phase of the military operation, the government claimed Swat would be cleared of all militants by mid-December 2007. The government, however, was forced to negotiate with Fazlullah in May 2008 after bloody fighting provided no gains for the government. Only two months later the peace deal fell apart and fighting erupted again in July 2008. The government hoped to defeat Fazlullah's militia by September, but the politicians were to be disappointed once again. The third phase of Operation Rah-e-Haq was launched on January 26, 2009, with heavy strikes on Fazlullah's positions, but it also met the same fate and ended up with another peace deal—this time incorporating the Nizam-e-Adl Regulations (*Geo TV* [Islamabad], February 17).

Conclusion

In Pakistan, the history of peace pacts with the Taliban is generally one of failure. In 1995, the first attempt was made to strike a deal with Maulana Sufi Mohammad for the imposition of Shari'a rule in Malakand region, but this effort failed. Now the issues are more complicated than in the past. Maulana Fazlullah, the young Taliban leader in Swat, is much tougher and more uncompromising than his aged father-in-law, Maulana Sufi Mohammad. The situation in Swat is as tense as ever, and mutual suspicions between the government and the militants are high. International pressure and regional uneasiness over the newly enacted Nizam-e-Adl regulations are likely to reduce the durability of this peace deal (*The News International*, February 17; *Express TV* [Lahore], February 16).

Mukhtar A. Khan is a Pashtun journalist based in Washington, D.C., covering the issues of Taliban and al-Qaeda in Pakistan-Afghanistan border regions. Since 9/11, he has extensively covered the War on Terror in Pakistan-Afghanistan tribal areas, both for the local and international media, including the BBC, Mail on Sunday, and Voice of America.

India's Home-Grown Jihadi Threat: A Profile of the Indian Mujahideen

By Animesh Roul

Unknown before 2008, the Indian Mujahideen (IM) has emerged as a well-organized jihadi terrorist group in India, claiming responsibility for a number of terror attacks perpetrated in various urban centers of India during 2007-2008. Even though the exact moment of IM's formation is not known, the recent arrest of a number of IM operatives has revealed its possible existence and involvement in terror strikes in India as far back as late October 2005. The name "Indian Mujahideen" was reportedly conceived at a terrorist conclave attended by top leaders of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Harkat-ul-Jehadi Islami (HuJI) in Pakistani-administered Kashmir in early May 2008 (Rediff.com, July 29, 2008).

The well-concealed rise of the Indian Mujahideen as a home grown jihadi organization is not a good omen for India's security. IM came into the open for the first time in November 2007, when simultaneous bomb blasts targeted lawyers in court premises in three Uttar Pradesh cities—Varanasi, Faizabad (Ayodhya), and Lucknow (NDTV, November 23, 2007). IM described the attacks as "Islamic raids" and justified them as revenge against lawyers who had allegedly assaulted a couple of Jaish-e-Muhammad terrorist suspects. IM also alleged that the lawyers had refused to take cases involving other alleged terrorists, including suspected HuJI leader and Phulpur-based Islamic cleric Muhammad Waliullah, the alleged mastermind of the March 2006 Sankatmochan temple blasts in Varanasi.

In IM terror strikes, email messages have typically been sent out to the media prior to the attacks, describing IM viewpoints on issues such as the Babri mosque demolition, the Mumbai riots, the communal violence in Gujarat that followed the 2002 torching of a train carrying Hindus, and various atrocities against the Muslim community in Gujarat and beyond. IM cites these incidents as reasons for their Islamic jihad. IM's email manifestos shed some light on its objectives. The group calls for spreading Islam in India and waging jihad against the "infidels" (non-Muslims, i.e. Hindus) and establishing "God's government" according to Quranic tenets.

After prolonged investigations, Indian intelligence agencies have corroborated that members of IM are mainly drawn from proscribed outfits such as the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), the Pakistan-based LeT and the Bangladesh-based HuJI. IM's email statements indicate their ties with SIMI when they put forward demands for the release of SIMI cadres under detention or serving jail terms. However, the newly emerged IM continues to deny any connection with Pakistan, Bangladesh, or any of their agencies (e.g. Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence [ISI] and Bangladesh's Directorate General of Forces Intelligence [DGFI]). It also denies any links with terrorist groups such as LeT and HuJI.

The Indian Mujahideen has been trying to garner support from India's teeming Muslim population, often by raising indigenous issues in its manifestos. Since the Uttar Pradesh Court attacks, IM, as a home-grown jihadi outfit, has claimed responsibility for at least four major terror strikes in 2008 that targeted civilians. Each attack came with prior emails to media citing a list of anti-Muslim atrocities in the country. The group justifies the violence by tagging the terror campaign as the "rise of Jihad" and the "revenge of Gujarat."¹

The Indian Mujahideen's Urban Mayhem

Massive IM terrorist attacks occurred throughout India in 2008, all apparently designed to inflict maximum civilian casualties:

- May 13, 2008: Jaipur, the capital city of Rajasthan State, suffered nine bomb blasts that killed over 60 and injured scores of people. The explosions occurred in busy market places, including Tripolia market, Manek Chowk and Johri Bazaar.
- July 25, 2008: IM struck again in India's IT capital, Bengaluru (Bangalore, Karnataka State), with eight simultaneous low-intensity blasts, in which at least two people were killed and seven injured. The explosions occurred near the Madivala check point in Hosur Road, the Adugodi area, a place near the Mallya Hospital, and another site near the Rashtriya Military School.

1 See the full text of IM's manifesto following the Ahmadabad blasts, signed by Al Arbi Guru al-Hindi; "The Rise of Jihad, Revenge of Gujarat," *Outlook India*, July 29, 2008.

- July 26, 2008: A series of over 16 synchronized bomb blasts hit Ahmadabad (Gujarat State), in which as many as 38 people were killed and more than 100 others injured. Most of the blasts occurred in crowded places like Hatkeshwar, Bapunagar, Narol, Ishanpur, Saraspur, Sarangpur, and L.G. General Hospital in Maninagar.

- September 13, 2008: The national capital, New Delhi, was hit by a series of five bomb blasts that killed nearly 30 people and injured over 100 others. The explosions took place in the crowded Karol Bagh area, the busy Barakhamba Road, the market place at Greater Kailash, and the Central Park in Cannaught Place area.

After widespread mayhem in these vital urban centers, the organization was subject to a stepped-up counterterrorist crackdown on its operatives and hideouts across the country. At least six senior IM leaders are reported to have fled to Pakistan or Bangladesh after the Delhi serial blasts. They were identified by Mumbai's Crime Branch as Riyaz Bhatkal, Amir Reza, Iqbal Bhatkal, Muhammad Khalid, Shahzad Ahmed, and Ariz Khan. After months of investigations it is widely believed by intelligence agencies in India that the IM was created by Pakistan's ISI to operate beyond Kashmir. However, no conclusive evidence has been gathered to implicate the ISI in such an alliance.² The alleged Pakistani connection has not been supported by the large number of arrests of Indian operatives after the recent terrorist attacks.

Terror Tentacles

Though many details of IM's organization remain unclear, some facets of the mystery were unraveled during the interrogations of arrested cadres, documented in the 1,809-page charge sheet filed by the Mumbai Crime Branch. 21 IM members have been charged for conspiracy, damaging a place of worship with intent to insult a particular religion, collecting arms for waging war, and waging war against the country. Most of the accused are from Azamgarh in Uttar Pradesh and are well-qualified professionals (*The Hindu*, February 18). Among the 21 suspects is Muhammed Saif, who was involved in the September 13, 2008, New Delhi serial blasts and was later captured during the controversial October 19, 2008, Batla House raids, in which two suspects were killed.

² For a possible ISI linkage, see, B. Raman, "Another step in ISI-sponsored Indianization of jihad," Rediff.com, July 27, 2008.

Since his arrest, Muhammad Saif has provided details of the IM organization and its countrywide activities. According to his confession, the Indian Mujahideen has four wings, each wing having a distinct responsibility for spreading terror in India with the LeT's active assistance (*Bangalore Mirror*, February 18; Rediff.com, February 10):

(1) Shahabuddin Ghouri Brigade: Headed by Amir Raza; responsible for planning and executing attacks in southern India, headquartered in Kerala

(2) Muhammad Ghaznavi Brigade: Responsible for planning and executing terror strikes in northern India

(3) Shaheed-al-Zarqawi Brigade: Responsible for targeting political and other important personalities of the country as well as organizing suicide attacks

(4) Media Wing: Headquartered in Pune, Maharashtra, the wing was responsible for email and print media communications/press release of manifestos before or after the blasts³

The arrest of IM cadres from different locations demonstrates the geographical spread of a terror network that now spans the length and breadth of India—possibly even extending into neighboring states.

Indian Mujahideen Who's Who

After months of speculation on the leadership hierarchy of IM, investigating agencies finally sketched a relatively clear picture of who's who in IM. Earlier, it had been speculated that the group's leader was Abdul Subhan Qureshi (a.k.a. Taqueer), a former SIMI cadre and software engineer by profession. However, instead the credit of founding the first home-grown Indian jihadi outfit goes to Sadiq Israr Sheikh of Azamgarh. A former SIMI member and an electronics engineer by profession, Sheikh has been identified as the co-founder and leader of the IM. Sheikh is alleged to have contacts with LeT in Pakistan through his brother-in-law, Mujahid Salim

³ The e-mail communications and manifestos were sent through similar IDs and signed with a distinct pseudonym, "Guru al-Hindi." See Praveen Swami, "Terror mail threatens to stop India's heartbeat," *The Hindu*, September 14, 2008.

(*The Hindu*, February 22). The anti-terrorism squad of the Maharashtra police has been interrogating Sheikh regarding his role in the group's July 2006 serial train blasts in Mumbai. Sheikh has described how the group planted seven cookers filled with explosives on the train before getting off in advance of the blasts (*Times of India*, February 27). Sheikh's confession also indicates IM's hand in the March 2006 attack on the Sankat Mochan temple in Varanasi.

Riyaz Bhatkal (a.k.a. Ismail Shahbandri), who has eluded police so far, is the commander of the southern region. Iqbal Bhatkal, Riyaz's brother, has a senior position in the IM hierarchy, according to police sources.⁴ Riyaz Bhatkal was previously involved in organized crime in Mumbai as part of the infamous Fazlu Rehman gang (Chennai Online, September 27, 2008). Interrogation of arrested IM members revealed that Bhatkal was a key LeT operative in south India who had planned the Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Ahmadabad, and New Delhi serial blasts (Rediff.com, January 5). Abdul Subhan Qureshi, still on the run and formerly believed to be IM's leader, has now been confirmed as the IM second-in-command. Despite previously being named as one of the country's most wanted terrorist masterminds, Abdul Subhan's name did not appear in the recently filed chargesheet (*Indian Express*, February 19).

The most surprising revelation has been the many IT professionals found to be involved in IM's activities, including wealthy professionals Asghar Peerbhoy, Salman Kadar Shaikh, and Asif Bashiruddin Shaikh, who have played pivotal roles in generating funds for the outfit and planning attacks. Peerbhoy, believed to have headed IM's media wing, reportedly worked for Yahoo.com before being arrested by the Mumbai Anti-Terror Squad in October 2008 (*Indian Express*, February 5, 2009).

Animesh Roul is the Executive Director of Research at the New Delhi-based Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict (SSPC).

⁴ For a detailed background of Riyaz Bhatkal and the influence of the Tabligh Jamaat on his thought, see "Politics of hate gave birth to top terror commander," *The Hindu*, February 23.