



# Terrorism Monitor

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Abu Qatada

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## KUWAIT'S HAMID ABDALLAH AL-ALI DESCRIBES PENDING DEFEAT OF AMERICANS IN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

Shaykh Hamid Abdallah al-Ali, a leading Kuwait-based Salafist preacher and advocate of global jihad, has declared that Islam's battle in Afghanistan will continue to escalate in the coming days, extending to Pakistan where the "Zionist-Crusader" alliance will use strategies similar to those that have already failed in Palestine, Iraq and Somalia. His analysis was contained in a May 2 article entitled "Afghan-Pakistani Tight Spot and Zion-American Ambitions" (muslm.net, May 2). The analysis was carried by many jihadist websites.

Al-Ali says the most prominent achievement of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) leader Baitullah Mahsud has been the rejuvenation of "the jihadist network in Afghanistan, all the warlords from Pashtun [tribes] and the mujahideen from the Punjab district... aligning them under one banner." The fusion of trained jihadis, funds and organizational skills has made it possible for Baitullah to strike anywhere in Pakistan. According to al-Ali, the success of the Taliban is based on its ability to win supporters and postpone "secondary disputes" within the alliance.

The Salafist preacher is, unsurprisingly, critical of Shiite Iran. Al-Ali notes that the "Safavids" (Iranians) do not cooperate with Sunni jihad movements, except temporarily to "burn out such movements" in a "wicked scheme." "What is astonishing in their ambition is that they want a deal that reaches a degree that



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equalizes them with the international deals the West concludes with China or Russia.” The shaykh suggests Iran will continue to display its ability to cause harm continuously until it is given status alongside the great powers, even if it involves provoking the United States in Latin America (an apparent reference to Iranian relations with Venezuela).

The shaykh suggests that the destruction of NATO supply lines through Pakistan to Afghanistan would be one of the greatest achievements of the ongoing jihad. This would help make the Afghanistan-Pakistan region “a vast and safe camp” for Islamic jihadis. “The Afghan-Pakistani jihad is gearing up to a higher degree, taking advantage of the U.S. exhaustion caused by the Iraqi quagmire, the economic crisis, [and] the widespread American fatigue from external wars...”

Shaykh Hamid Abdallah al-Ali is best known for his 1999 fatwa declaring the government of Kuwait to be composed of disbelievers – legitimate targets for the mujahideen – and for his early 2001 fatwa sanctioning suicide bombings, including those involving the flying of aircraft into public buildings (see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 26, 2007).

#### TNSM LEADER SUFI MUHAMMAD FIGHTS GOVERNMENT OFFENSIVE IN SWAT WITH A BARRAGE OF WORDS

Even as 15,000 Pakistani troops prepared to flood the Swat valley stronghold of his Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) movement, Maulana Sufi Muhammad continued to unleash a series of edicts on topics as varied as democracy, the status of women and the Islamic legitimacy of photography.

Sufi Muhammad was reported to have left his home in Lower Dir on May 4 after it was hit by mortar fire in the opening phases of Operation Rah-e-Haq 4. He is now believed to be in the TNSM stronghold at Aman Darra (*Pakistan Observer*, May 5). His son, Maulana Kifayatullah, was killed in the shelling of his home in Lower Dir (*The News*, [Islamabad], May 8).

In a recent interview by Pakistani television, Sufi Muhammad rejected democracy as the creation of “infidels.” The TNSM leader asked, “How can people who believe in democracy be expected to enforce the ideals of Shari’a?” Even the Islamic states of Saudi

Arabia and Iran had failed to implement Shari’a to Sufi Muhammad’s satisfaction as he cited the Taliban regime of Afghanistan as the only example of a government that had properly administered Islamic law. According to Sufi Muhammad, communism, socialism and fascism were also “un-Islamic” political systems (Geo TV, May 4). In the same interview, he also condemned still photography and videos as “un-Islamic,” before declaring that in a Taliban-run society, women would only be allowed to leave their house to perform pilgrimage to Mecca (*Daily Times* [Lahore], May 4). Finally, Sufi Muhammad proclaimed that jihad was not mandatory in Kashmir as Islamic insurgents there were seeking a state rather than the implementation of Shari’a (*The News*, May 3).

Sufi Muhammad has not escaped criticism from other Islamic scholars in Pakistan. A recent meeting of the Ahl-e-Sunna in Karachi issued a statement asking if Taliban excesses in Swat would now be dealt with by the new Islamic courts. “If not, to whom are they accountable for the injustice they have committed? Who slaughtered innocent people, dishonored bodies, and hanged them on poles? Will they be called to any Shari’a court and [be] sentenced? Is it legal, according to Shari’a, to dishonor the body of a rival and then hang it from a tree? Do the people who have a different opinion deserve death? Are the people who have killed scholars of the Ahl-e-Sunna or forced them to migrate and taken control of their mosques, madaris, and properties exempt from the dictates of Shari’a, or are they answerable to any Shari’a court?” (Jang Online, May 4).

The Pakistani press has also been highly critical of Sufi Muhammad’s failure to fulfill his end of the peace agreement with the NWFP government, his rejection of government-appointed qazis (Islamic judges) and his unwillingness to disarm local Taliban and TNSM fighters (*Aaj Kal*, May 5; *Nawa-e-Waqt*, May 5; *Jinnah*, May 5). According to one major daily, “The demands of the TNSM have been accepted by the government, and they are being implemented as well. Despite this, the opposition by Sufi Muhammad and his disciples is beyond comprehension. Apparently, it appears that these people have a desire to establish a state within a state to be headed by Sufi Muhammad. Such a situation cannot be acceptable to a sovereign country. Therefore, it will be justified if the Army launches an operation for the stability and security of the country” (*Khabrain*, May 5).

## Hizb-ut Towhid Adds to the Jihadi Conundrum in Bangladesh

By Wilson John

An Islamist group blending unorthodox religious practices with a belief that Muslims form a military caste dedicated to jihad is the latest in a series of Islamist militant groups to emerge as a security threat in Bangladesh. Thirty-one members of Hizb-ut Towhid (The Party of Monotheism - HuT) were arrested on April 18 in Kushtia district (100 kms from the capital of Dhaka) for planning to carry out terrorist attacks (*Daily Star* [Dhaka], April 19). Police seized jihadi books, leaflets, gunpowder and bomb-making materials from the group's office, which is used for training its recruits. Although HuT is one of 29 organizations listed by Bangladesh intelligence agencies for its involvement in militancy, police officials believe that the group is not yet ready to take on the state (*Daily Star*, April 19).

The group's agenda, however, is quite clear. It promotes jihad to establish the rule of Islam through literature, training and indoctrination. An HuT book entitled "Islamer Prokrito Salah" (Real Prayer of Islam) states: "[if anyone] leaves jihad or armed struggle, they shall not be accepted by Allah." The book also says that Muslims as a whole are a military nation. "The whole nation is a military force, each and every Muslim is a soldier, a mujahid and a warrior" (*Daily Star*, April 18). HuT members have a number of unusual beliefs that set them apart from other Muslims. They do not exchange the customary formula of Islamic greetings, do not pray in mosques and refer to the call to prayer as the "barking of dogs" (*Daily Star*, August 28, 2005).

There are signs HuT is preparing a terrorist offensive. Moulana Mahbub, the HuT chief in Kushtia district (where the recent arrests were made), trained and fought in Afghanistan and was planning to carry out an attack when he was arrested last month. In 2007, the police arrested a dozen HuT members from Chandpur district who were suspected of being aligned with Jamaat-ul Mujahideen (JMB), an extremist group involved in several terrorist incidents in Bangladesh and considered to be heavily influenced by al-Qaeda. More recent evidence is found in the group's establishment of ties with some Kashmiri militant groups in India with the objective of supplying weapons and raising funds for jihad in Kashmir. HuT views India as the "enemy of Islam" (*Weekly Blitz* [Dhaka], April 22).

The group was set up from 1995-1996 by Bayejid Khan Ponni (a.k.a. Selim Ponni) who left Bangladesh immediately after independence and returned in the 1980s to preach a radical version of Islam (*Daily Star*, April 19). He is a cousin of the former Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Humayun Khan Panni (bangladeshnews.com, August 13, 2006). Ponni, by some media accounts, has written a total of eight books on jihad which are widely circulated through dedicated outlets across the country (bangladeshnews.com, August 8, 2007). His first book, *A Islam Islam Noi* (This Islam is Not Real Islam) was heavily criticized and eventually banned by the Awami League government (*Daily Star*, September 28, 2003). Ponni's second book, *Islamer Prokrito Roop Rekha* (Main Policies of Islam) argued that if democracy was not replaced with Shari'a rule in any society, armed struggle should be continued until Shari'a was implemented. A third book, *Dazzal*, called Jews and Christians "evil." Ponni has called upon his followers, who consider him an imam, to migrate to foreign countries to continue jihad against Jews and Christians. A large number of HuT militants have gone abroad after indoctrination (*Weekly Blitz*, April 22).

HuT has deliberately kept away from the limelight by confining itself to spreading the message of their leader through leaflets and street corner meetings. Working under the guise of the generally non-militant Tablighi Jamaat missionary organization, HuT has been campaigning in smaller towns and villages in central and south Bangladesh for several years (see *Terrorism Focus*, February 13, 2008). These campaigns are aimed at recruiting men and women to the group's cause. The recruits are indoctrinated at several offices run by the group across Bangladesh. Recruitment efforts are part of the phased growth of HuT. "We are now at a primary level of jihad and limit our work to awareness building and seeking new mujahideen," a HuT leader told a newspaper in 2005 (*The Daily Star*). This recruitment drive was low key until 2003, when the group became more open and aggressive. The leaders talked openly about Islamic revolution and doled out money and gifts such as mobile phones to attract young men and women from poor families. By most accounts, the group has a strength of 1,200, with a women's wing and a publicity division (*The Daily Star*, April 19). Several recruits have been trained in suicide missions (*Weekly Blitz*, April 22).

A Dhaka weekly has suggested that the unorthodox HuT is a counter-intelligence creation designed to discredit Muslim fighters. "The game is a familiar one in which foreign intelligence outfits create fake Islamist



groups within Muslim nations of strategic importance while their media outlets serve to publicize the Islamist militancy phobia in order to justify political, economic and military interventions” (Holiday Online [Dhaka], May 7).

Nevertheless, there are fears in Bangladesh that if smaller groups like HuT are allowed to operate freely, there is a real possibility they may facilitate the operations of other Islamist militant groups, including those aligned with al-Qaeda.

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## British Hostage Threatened with Death Unless Abu Qatada is Released from British Prison

By Raffaello Pantucci

Warnings continue to come from Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) that time is running out for the British government if it wants to obtain the release of a kidnapped British tourist by freeing imprisoned al-Qaeda ideologue Abu Qatada al-Filistini (*Ennahar* [Algiers], May 2). While Austrian and Canadian hostages were recently released, AQIM issued a statement on April 27 giving the UK government 20 days to release Abu Qatada before their British captive is killed (*Guardian*, April 27; BBC, April 27). Abu Qatada is currently awaiting possible deportation to Jordan, where he faces a variety of terrorism-related charges (see *Terrorism Monitor*, July 11, 2008).

Despite being imprisoned, Abu Qatada appears to still propagate global jihad. In late March, a lengthy presentation emerged on extremist websites purporting to have come from Abu Qatada in his current home at Long Lartin prison (*Al-Quds al-Arabi*, March 23). The article was not the first piece to emerge from the incarcerated cleric (previous articles have emerged commenting on Palestine and an interview with a fellow prisoner praising al-Qaeda), and questions have been raised about how effective his imprisonment has been in shutting him off from proselytizing to the outside world (*Daily Telegraph*, April 5). The Palestinian cleric was, until earlier this year, under highly restrictive house arrest, but following the emergence of unrevealed evidence which may have suggested he was about to flee

the country, British police re-arrested him.

Though the origin of the letter and previous statements cannot be confirmed, the Palestinian cleric has not denied them and the texts appear to be consistent with his previous writings. This is also not the first time that letters from jailed extremists in the UK have reached the public domain – most prominently, both Dhiren Barot (a.k.a. Essa el-Britani who features in the 9/11 Commission report as an al-Qaeda planner) and Omar Khyam (head of the 2004 UK “fertilizer plot”) have made their voices heard beyond prison walls ([www.al-istiqaamah.com](http://www.al-istiqaamah.com)). Unlike these other men, Qatada is being held in part as a consequence of his pro-jihad sermons, rather than his active participation in jihad.

The tract opens with Abu Qatada giving thanks to Allah for providing him with the opportunity to achieve so many things while he has been incarcerated these last six years. As he puts it, “had I spent all of my life outside of the prison, I would not have attained them.” He goes on to enumerate these achievements, including memorizing the Quran, writing two books, named *Fann al-Qira’ah* (The Art of Reading) and *Limatha Intarsarna?* (Why Were We Victorious?), a number of papers, “tens of poems” and filling a number of notebooks with his musings and memories on a variety of “introspective” religious topics and one he kept “hidden” about his long suffering wife. In addition, he expresses gratitude to Allah for helping him lose “more than 25 kilograms,” and praises the prison’s salutary impact upon him in helping cure him from his diabetes and “severe back pain.”

Much of the rest of the piece, which takes the form of a long letter to the umma, dissects the British legal system, making numerous accusations of racism against it. However, the letter for the most part tries to paint these as victories for extremists, proving just how unfair and anti-Muslim the UK is, thus vindicating the extremists’ cause. Abu Qatada boldly asserts that “we have defeated the British government” and that British values no longer hold sway for the new generation of British Muslim youth raised in the shadow of “Britain’s Guantanamo,” Belmarsh Prison. In fact, for these youths, “especially those from the Indian subcontinent... they know [Britain’s] enmity towards them, so they have become enemies towards it as well.”

The imprisoned cleric describes dark deals between the British government and those of Jordan and Libya, “through which the rendition of Muslims to their

(original) countries takes place.” He also highlights the British government’s belief that “there is justice in Jordan” and that torture in that country is something that the British judicial system feels it is able “to work around.” The British government has in fact for the most part been unable to actually utilize the deportation agreements that it has signed with Jordan and Libya because of these issues, leading to the very legal limbo in which individuals like Abu Qatada find themselves.

Qatada refers in passing to a number of other extremists he has come across while inside, including Barbar Ahmed (whom the U.S. government is trying to extradite on charges of running extremist websites), radical preacher Abu Hamza al-Masri, Haroon Rashid Aswat (Abu Hamza’s deputy, wanted by the United States on charges of trying to establish a terrorist training camp in Bly, Oregon) and numerous others. Most interesting, however, are the cleric’s alleged interactions with Dr. Mohammed Asha and Dr. Bilal Abdullah, the two men tried for the 2007 attempted car bombings in London and Glasgow. Dr. Asha was acquitted, but is facing possible deportation for visa issues, while Dr. Abdullah was found guilty and given a 32-year sentence (*Times*, December 17, 2008). Abu Qatada reports that he was very impressed by Dr. Abdullah, saying, “a man from the men of Islam, in knowledge, action, steadfastness and manhood,” before whom he “felt insignificant,” especially when he heard Abdullah say he had been influenced by Qatada’s tapes.

The underlying point of much of Qatada’s statement is to highlight the inequalities of the British legal system and the targeting of Muslim prisoners in particular. “I admit that despite the fact that I am Palestinian, and was born in Palestine and despite my knowledge of the history of the British Government in its crimes in general, and in its crime in Palestine in particular, I was ignorant of this hatred and malice harbored by these British Governments against Islam, the Muslims, and the Arabs... I wish that all the Muslims in Britain would be imprisoned for a period that is not less than one year so that they would see with their own eyes the truth of what I am saying” (*Al-Quds al-Arabi*, March 23).

Finally, the letter also highlights a number of serious problems within the British legal system – such as the inability of the British government to either convict or deport Abu Qatada (*Jordan Times*, February 22). This legal limbo provides ideological sustenance to those who claim British anti-terrorism policy is anti-Muslim. Unable so far to send Abu Qatada to Jordan, where he

faces life imprisonment, the fate of a British citizen is now apparently tied to that of Abu Qatada and Britain’s demands for the hostage’s unconditional release.

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## Morocco’s Multi-Pronged Counterterrorism Strategy

By Matthew Chebatoris

This May marks the sixth anniversary of the deadly night of suicide bombings in Casablanca. The attacks, characterized by many as Morocco’s 9/11, took the lives of 33 innocent victims, while the attackers, hailing from the slums of Sidi Moumen, lost 12 of their own. Since that dark night, Moroccans have been led by King Mohammad VI on a path to cleanse the kingdom of the scourge of violent extremism. In pursuit of this goal, Morocco has embarked on a multi-pronged strategy to combat terrorism and thwart the efforts of the Algerian-based Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) to widen the theater of regional jihad in North Africa. The strategy is comprehensive in nature and sets out multiple objectives which illuminate Morocco’s position as a beacon of hope in the often tumultuous North African political environment.

### Judicial Actions

Morocco’s judiciary remains a key player in the country’s counterterrorism arsenal and routinely coordinates its efforts with counterparts abroad. This is particularly true in cases involving the ongoing prosecution of individuals suspected of having ties to the 2003 Casablanca bombings and the attacks on Madrid’s transportation system the following year. The Moroccan Islamic Combat Group (Groupe Islamique Combattant Marocain - GICM), suspected by some to have played a role in one or both of the attacks, may be defunct, but the group’s legacy lives on in the courts. In early March, an appeals court in Sale sentenced GICM member Hassan al-Haski to ten years in prison for his involvement in the 2003 Casablanca bombings. He was charged with “forming a criminal gang to prepare and

commit terror attacks aimed at seriously undermining the public order by means of terror and violence” (Maghreb Arab Presse, March 2). Hassan is one of three al-Haski brothers, all of whom have been affiliated with transnational terrorism. He was captured by Spanish authorities in the Canary Islands in 2004 after leading authorities on a month-long manhunt in the wake of the 2004 Madrid bombings (Lukor.com [Granada], December, 2004).

An arrangement between Moroccan and Spanish authorities allowed Hassan al-Haski to be temporarily transferred to Morocco to stand trial. He has now been returned to Spanish custody to continue serving a 14-year sentence for his involvement in the Madrid attacks (Assabah, February 26; AFP, April 3). One week earlier the Moroccan court sentenced Saad al-Husseini, an alleged “key plotter” in the Casablanca attacks, to 15 years in prison. In a related move, the court also handed out sentences ranging from three to eight years imprisonment to 17 of his co-conspirators (Maghreb Arab Presse, March 2). In addition to prosecuting individuals involved in the 2003 Casablanca attacks, the terrorist tribunal in Sale recently convicted 29 individuals for belonging to a terrorist organization. The prosecution stated the men were members of AQIM and to varying degrees had been active in planning terror attacks, inciting violence and holding unauthorized meetings (AFP, April 17).

While the prosecution of terror suspects has grabbed headlines, Morocco’s judiciary has also been extending a carrot to detained Salafi-Jihadi detainees. The Moroccan Human Rights Dignity Forum Association recently invited Saudi and Egyptian clerics to speak at an international conference on April 24th. The selected clerics were previously involved in leading spiritual efforts to rehabilitate jailed Islamists (Assabah, April 20). It is not clear which specific cases they have been involved in and the Saudi program has suffered some significant setbacks (see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 10). Egypt, however, has had notable successes in rehabilitating former Islamic Group (IG) members, including the high profile recantation of militancy by former Egyptian Islamic Jihad and al-Zawahiri associate Sayyid Imam (a.k.a. Dr. Fadl) (see *Terrorism Monitor*, December 10, 2007; *Terrorism Focus*, April 30, 2008). It is too early to tell if we can expect similar “confessions” to arise from Moroccan prisons. Rehabilitation programs, Islamist or otherwise, are never a silver bullet and are often most effective with those who are not yet fully

committed to their cause. Nonetheless, the inclusion of Saudi and Egyptian representatives in the early stages of developing a prison-based rehabilitation program for jailed Islamists is a sign that Moroccan authorities are taking the initiative seriously and hoping to replicate and perhaps build upon the past successes of similar programs abroad.

#### Advanced Military Training

The threat from AQIM has been largely rhetorical, inasmuch as available information does not suggest there have been any substantive AQIM-led plots inside Morocco. On the other hand, an increase in military training and regional cooperation has undoubtedly played a hand in maintaining a secure environment. Three specialized units have recently been established in the Moroccan Army. The units were formed to focus on illegal immigration, terrorism and drug smuggling – three interwoven plagues currently confronting Morocco. The staffing for each unit reportedly calls for 140 soldiers and 13 officers, led by a colonel. American and French forces have provided specialized training to the units (Assabah, March 12). The initiative appears to be a step towards diversifying the ranks of the Moroccan Armed Forces by adding advanced training and creating elite units capable of combating the threats facing the kingdom after making the transition to an all volunteer force in 2006 (see *Terrorism Monitor*, February 21, 2007).

Separately, the Moroccan military conducted a large scale combined arms exercise this April near Oum Driga. The maneuvers involved over 2,000 troops operating both on the ground and in the air and were designed in part to test the interoperability of the services and their newly acquired U.S. and European weapons systems (Assabah, April 9). Although it remains unstated, a possible objective of the exercise may have been a show of force aimed at Algeria in the wake of recent protests by the Algerian-based Polisario and its perennial effort to draw attention to its demands for an independent Western Sahara. In addition to the newly acquired Western military equipment, Morocco is rumored to be in negotiations with Russia to purchase Boyevaya Mashina Desanta (BMD) armored vehicles similar to those recently delivered to neighboring Algeria (Assabah, April 20). If true, this may suggest Morocco is engaging in an unofficial arms race with neighboring Algeria – an historic rival.

## Regional Cooperation

The 28th meeting of the Arab Maghreb Union Ministerial Council was held in Tripoli on April 19. Regional integration is one of the stated aims of the ministerial council, although political obstacles have proved to be impediments to measurable progress (al-Jazeera, April 19). Substantive discussions on regional security and cooperation are more likely to gain traction at the working level between the nations' various security services. Reports from the February 23 meeting of the heads of the Maghreb's security agencies in Nouakchott indicate there is now recognition of the threat AQIM poses to regional stability. The agency heads acknowledged the threat not only to infrastructure targets within their respective countries, but also the impact terror attacks could have on the flow of commerce and migration throughout the Maghreb (Agence Mauritanienne d'Information, February 23).

## Slum Eradication

The revelation that the assailants in the May 2003 Casablanca bombings hailed from the city's vast slums gave momentum to the belief that poverty is responsible for terrorism. Nevertheless, more complex socio-economic factors have likely contributed to fostering an environment in which the socially and economically less fortunate may be susceptible to the violent message of Salafi-Jihadis and likeminded aspirants.

Thus, one year after experiencing the worst terrorist attack ever on Moroccan soil, King Mohammad VI challenged his government to remove all of the country's slums by 2010 under a program entitled "2004 – 2010 Cities without Slums." According to the United Nations, this program encompasses three principles: 1) Assess existing slums and slum households in consultation with community leaders, 2) Establish re-housing and home upgrading programs which coordinate the resources of the community, the local government, the private sector, and the state, and 3) Develop new urban centers with affordable low income housing. Costs are estimated to run \$1.7 billion and will include \$540 million in government subsidies. [1]

Although Morocco has become a popular tourist destination for those seeking an exotic, yet safe location, prior to the initiation of "Cities without Slums" approximately 1.5 million Moroccans lived in slums on the outskirts of the country's largest cities.

According to Fatna Chihab, the head of social housing at the Ministry for Habitat and Urban Planning, "Slums are a problem all over the developing world. Morocco's originality is that his majesty has decided to tackle the issue head on." To date, roughly 43 percent of the 300,000 families identified as living in urban slums have been re-housed, claimed Chihab. The new urban areas are being purposefully designed with schools, hospitals and community centers incorporated into the plans. (United Mediterranean Council of Industries [UMCI] News, April 21). Additional steps are being taken to provide better living conditions for the country's rural community. Initiatives are currently in place to bring electricity and running water to rural villages as a measure to discourage poor residents from migrating to urban areas and complicating the slum eradication efforts underway. (UMCI News, April 21)

## The Thread that Binds

The Moroccan government alone cannot surmount the counterterrorism challenges it faces. Success will hinge on the right combination of domestic measures and the support of regional counterparts and allies abroad. An often overlooked element will be the implementation of a coherent strategic communications plan which effectively communicates the government's goals and objectives to its citizens and neighbors in a non-threatening manner. Eradicating the nation's slums and re-housing occupants is an honorable measure, but it will only be effective at stemming the tide of terrorist aspirants if it is completed in a manner which does not further disenfranchise a segment of society that has proven to be receptive to the call of violent extremism in the past. The same logic holds true regarding the actions of Morocco's armed forces, judiciary and security services.

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## Notes:

1. "Cities without Slums Programme in Morocco to achieve a slum free target by 2010," United Nations Human Settlement Program Report, October 2004.



## The Swat Conflict: An Arc of Instability Spreading from Afghanistan to Central Asia and Xinjiang

By Syed Adnan Ali Shah Bukhari and Sadia Sulaiman

In the wake of a controversial deal that allowed the implementation of Islamic law in Pakistan's Swat region and the establishment of what appeared to be a de facto Taliban state, Islamabad has responded with force after the Swat-based militants appeared determined to spread their presence beyond the Swat valley. The result has been some of the most serious fighting yet seen in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). The government offensive has come, in part, in response to international demands for Pakistan to contain the spread of an arc of political instability through Central Asia.

On February 16, 2009, the government of the NWFP and the proscribed Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM) signed a peace agreement to enforce Shari'a Nizam-e-Adl (Islamic System of Justice) in the Malakand Division and the Kohistan district of Hazara Division (*Dawn* [Karachi], February 17). The deal raised eyebrows within a large segment of Pakistani society and the international community, who believed that the agreement signified the defeat of the Pakistani State and a victory for the Taliban, who are dictating to the former at gun point. While the NWFP government continues to defend the peace deal, it has grave strategic and security implications that will not only imperil the domestic security of Pakistan, but also jeopardize the security of northern Afghanistan, Central Asia and China.

### Strategic Importance of Malakand Division

Malakand Division comprises one third of the NWFP, and forms the northern part of Pakistan. It is spread over an area of nearly 30,000 sq. km and has a population of 5.52 million. The Division consists of seven districts - Malakand, Buner, Swat, Shangla, Upper Dir, Lower Dir and Chitral. It borders Afghanistan's Badakhshan and Nuristan Provinces in the north and northwest. In the southwest, Malakand Division shares a border with the Bajaur and Mohmand Agencies of Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). In the east, Malakand Division shares a border in its Chitral and Swat districts

with the strategically important Federally Administered Northern Areas (FANA) of Pakistan (corresponding to Pakistani-controlled Kashmir), which in turn is contiguous with China's Uyghur-inhabited Xinjiang Province in the north. In the south, Malakand shares a border with densely-inhabited Charsadda-Peshawar, Mardan and Swabi districts of the NWFP. A cursory look at the conflict-ridden Swat district reveals that it forms the core of the Malakand Division, and shares borders with all the other districts of the Division. With the exception of Chitral, which is inhabited by the Indo-Iranian Dardic language-speaking Khowar and Kalash tribes, the Malakand Division is inhabited largely by Pashtun tribes, mainly the Yousafzai. [1]

### Security Ramifications of the Talibanization of Malakand

After the February 2009 peace agreement, the TTP-Swat started to expand to the adjoining districts of Buner, Shangla, and Lower and Upper Dir under the pretext of enforcing Nizam-e-Adl. The TTP-Swat's earlier efforts in 2007 and 2008 to penetrate the adjoining districts were effectively foiled by the joint efforts of the government and the local people.

The Swat Taliban initiated a drive to recruit locals in Swat, Buner and Shangla in an attempt to create self-sustaining local Taliban structures in these districts (*Daily Times* [Lahore], April 14; *The News*, April 16). The TNSM, which seem to be acting as a political wing of the TTP-Swat, even attempted to enter Chitral to promote its agenda of Talibanization under the garb of Nizam-e-Adl in April. However, a local peace committee of Chitral requested TNSM leader Sufi Muhammad to postpone his visit, saying it could "create law and order problems in the area" (*The News*, April 17).

The expansion of the Taliban in Malakand Division is a source of grave concern. There are visible concerns within the Pakistani establishment and society that the Taliban have reached within 100 miles of the capital, Islamabad, and may seek to capture it (*The News*, April 20). Maulana Fazlur Rehman of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazal (JUI-F) expressed his concerns in parliament on April 22, 2009, when he said, "If the Taliban continue to move at this pace, they will soon be knocking at the doors of Islamabad" (*The News*, April 23). More threatening is the presence of a significant number of non-local and foreign militants in Swat that pose a serious threat to northern Afghanistan, Central Asia and China's Xinjiang Province. [2]



The non-local militants within the Swat Taliban include the Waziristani Taliban. Similarly, Central Asian militants belonging to Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) and East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) form the bulk of foreign militants within the TTP-Swat (*Daily Times*, November 7). The IMU, while maintaining a working relationship with al-Qaeda, does not subscribe to the latter's ideology of global jihad, preferring to wage a local struggle in Central Asia to overthrow the ex-communist regimes in these countries. [3] These Central Asian militants maintain strong bonds with elements of the TTP but are opposed by others, most notably the faction led by Ahmed Nazir, the Amir of the South Waziristan Taliban (Asian News International, August 16, 2008). According to Pakistani security officials, "a large number of [Baitullah] Mahsud's men from Waziristan... have joined the militant forces in Swat and some 6,000 to 8,000 highly trained and well-armed militants are engaged in fighting the government forces" (Newline [Karachi], February 2009). In the recent takeover of Buner by the Taliban, locals reported the presence of "Afghan Tajiks" within the ranks of the Pakistani Taliban. These militants could not speak Pashtu and used interpreters to communicate with locals while forcibly taking over their properties (*The News*, April 22).

Given the unique geostrategic significance of Malakand Division, if the Taliban and the foreign militants are able to strengthen themselves in the region, it could negatively affect the neighboring countries. Dir and Chitral districts border Afghanistan's comparatively stable non-Pashtun provinces in the north and the militants may try to destabilize them in the long term. The Taliban could attack the supply routes which the United States and NATO have recently negotiated with the Central Asian countries to ship supplies through Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to their troops stationed in Afghanistan (Geo TV, April 21; see also *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, April 7).

Chitral district also borders the Wakhan corridor of Afghanistan, which is a 15-km wide stretch of land separating Pakistan from the Central Asian States. If Taliban rule is established in the Malakand area, the Central Asian militants might contemplate using Swat and Chitral as a springboard to conduct cross-border attacks in the Central Asian States. Until 2007, these Central Asian and Uyghur militants were based in Waziristan region and it was very difficult for them to conduct operations in Central Asia from there due to the distance. However, the strengthening of the Taliban in

Swat district means that they have been able to establish a Taliban base almost 390 km north of Waziristan near the Wakhan corridor.

Swat and Chitral also border the strategically important Northern Areas of Pakistan, which share a border with the Xinjiang Province of China. This could provide a land passage to Uyghur separatist militants belonging to ETM, though the group has been largely inactive since the death of its leader, Hassan Mahsum, at the hands of Pakistani troops in 2003. The ETIM militants are presently allied with the Uzbek militants of the IMU and its splinter group, the IJU, for strategic and religious reasons. This means that strengthening of Taliban and foreign militants in Malakand Division could enable ETIM to conduct cross-border terrorist activities in the Xinjiang Province of China with more ease.

The Taliban are also attempting to establish a presence in the Kohistan and Battagram districts of Hazara Division and the Kala Dakha area of Mansehra Division, which hold immense geostrategic significance since the strategic Karakoram Highway (KKH) that connects Pakistan with China passes through these areas (*Dawn*, April 29). If the Taliban are able to consolidate themselves in the above mentioned areas they would be in a position to block the KKH, or create security problems that could sever the only land-link between Pakistan and China. The KKH was blocked several times by the TNSM in the 1990s to force their demand for Shari'a in Malakand.

Similarly, after establishing a permanent presence in Chitral, the Taliban could block the Lwari Pass that connects Chitral with the rest of the country. One cannot rule out the potential for the Taliban to employ the same strategy in blocking the strategic Kotal Pass in Darra Adamkhel that connects the northern districts of the NWFP with its southern districts.

Similarly, al-Qaeda's retreat into the Safi tribe's area of Mohmand Agency after being uprooted from the Bajaur Agency during military operations (August 2008-February 2009) is an important factor that cannot be ignored. Al-Qaeda may exploit the Talibanization of Malakand Division. FANA and Chitral have a sizeable Shi'a population, and al-Qaeda may try to provoke a Sunni-Shi'a sectarian conflict similar to the patterns of conflict witnessed in Iraq and Pakistan. This could enable al-Qaeda to flourish in the conflict-ridden areas and gather support from the Sunni extremists in the region. It might become very difficult for the Pakistani government to deploy its troops throughout the length

and breadth of this 2400 km mountainous border region in order to fight militants and their terrorist infrastructure in the region. Already, Muslim Khan, spokesman of TTP-Swat, has expressed his willingness to host Osama bin Laden in Malakand (*The News*, April 22).

### Conclusion

Previous peace agreements with Taliban militants in North and South Waziristan from 2004-2006 have tended to strengthen the Taliban militants, who established quasi-parallel governments in the region. Similarly, the February 2009 government-TNSM peace agreement serves to bolster and further embolden the Swat Taliban. Since the TTP-Swat is not part of the agreement it does not feel itself bound by the terms of the agreement and has hence indulged in violations of the peace agreement since its implementation (*Daily Times*, April 15). TTP-Swat stated many times that its jihad in Afghanistan would continue against US and ISAF-NATO forces (*The News*, February 22).

At present, the Taliban phenomenon in Pakistan is confined to the western border with Afghanistan. Taliban activity in the Pak-Afghan border region has worsened Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan, the United States and ISAF-NATO forces. However, the forward movement of the Taliban towards the north of the country may complicate Pakistan's relations with China, Central Asia and Russia. It would push the South and Central Asia into a cauldron of violence that could jeopardize the stability of the entire region.

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### Notes:

1. Syed Adnan Ali Shah Bukhari, "Swat: A Dangerous Flashpoint in the Making," Pakistan Security Research Unit (PSRU)-University of Bradford, UK, Brief No. 25, December 6, 2007, <http://spaces.brad.ac.uk:8080/download/attachments/748/Brief25finalised.pdf>
2. "Foreign Militants Also Fighting in Swat," DG Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), February 5, 2009
3. B. Raman, "Threat to Beijing Olympics from Uyghurs," March 10, 2008, <http://www.ict.org.il/Articles/tabid/66/Articlsid/278/currentpage/4/Default.aspx>