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AFGHAN TALIBAN PREDICT U.S. CHANGE OF COMMAND WILL LEAD TO AMERICAN COLLAPSE

Afghan Taliban spokesman Qari Yusuf Ahmadi has delivered the movement's reaction to Washington's decision to make changes in the command of the U.S. military effort in Afghanistan (Sawt al-Jihad, May 12). Responding to President Obama's May 11 replacement of General David McKiernan with former Joint Special Operations Command Chief Lieutenant General Stanley McChrystal and the appointment of a former general, Karl Eikenberry, as the new U.S. ambassador in Kabul, the Taliban spokesman suggested the changes were a sign "the Americans and their allies have totally lost their way as far as how to win the war in Afghanistan and are increasingly losing patience and focus."

Qari Yusuf claimed that seven years of warfare had only resulted in "an increase in [the occupiers'] economic burden and total failure on the battlefield." He went on to suggest the Taliban's assessment was one shared by "the international media and experts," who were predicting total American defeat in the military and political fields. "At present, the enemy is in a state of panic throughout the country, rural areas have come under the control of the mujahideen and the enemy supply routes are under our watchful eyes. It seems that the latest urgent measures and leadership changes by the enemy are the result of this pressure."

According to Qari Yusuf, it was only some months ago that there was steady discussion by American officials and the Western media of the failures and

corruption of the Hamid Karzai government in Kabul, yet as elections approach, the U.S. has realized there is “no worthy political leadership in Afghanistan,” with the result that they are preparing Karzai and his corrupt team for another term in office. This political failure has led to changes in the political and military leadership of the American presence in Afghanistan.

With regard to the change in military command, Qari Yusuf pointed out, “In the past four years [the Americans] have repeatedly changed their military commanders - with every new commander boasting about new strategy and military experience. However, with the passing of time, it has been made clear to them that this war could not be won... Just like the former Soviet Union, they will be forced to admit to the realities, but it will be too late by then and many of their generals would have lost their lives and careers.”

STRUGGLING AL-MUSTAFA ARMY PLEDGES KURDS WILL TAKE NINAWA PROVINCE “OVER OUR DEAD BODIES”

A spokesman for Iraq’s Jaysh al-Mustafa (Mustafa Army) used an internet question and answer session to admit setbacks but vowed to prevent the Kurdish takeover of the northern Iraqi province of Ninawa (Nineveh), the main base of the Sunni militant group (Media Commission of the Al-Mustafa Army in Iraq, May 15).

According to the spokesman, Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Iraqi, the group was formed in Ninawa Governate two months after the March 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. At first they operated under the name “al-Fatihin Army” during their earliest operations in Mosul. In time, the group expanded to Salah al-Din Governate and even into the outskirts of Baghdad. This continued until April 2004, when “occupation forces broke into our locations and arrested our most prominent leaders.” After this serious setback, the group slowly recovered and today consists of 12 “brigades,” though only four of these are operational due to “poor resources and lack of funding.” Shaykh Abu-Abdallah al-Ansari is the Amir of the Al-Mustafa Army in Iraq.

Abu Abd al-Rahman also attributed the lack of internet videos depicting al-Mustafa Army operations to “weak financial capabilities” and “the geographical nature of the city Mosul,” though the latter point was not explained. The Mustafa Army relies on “the charitable people in Ninawa Governate” for their funding, though

these contributions have declined dramatically after threats were made to those funding the group. This has resulted in a decrease in the number of operations. Al-Mustafa Army supports the use of martyrdom operations (suicide bombings), but has not conducted any due to a “lack of assets.” Despite this, Abu Abd al-Rahman insists the jihad in Iraq is mandatory for every man, woman and child.

Admission of new fighters is made on the recommendation of a trusted person or a mosque cleric. Recruits must meet certain requirements regarding religious observance, good manners, etc. Abu Abd al-Rahman denies that foreign fighters are in the ranks of al-Mustafa Army. “In fact, we have not received any admission request from expatriate brothers, but we do not deny their fraternity and we are grateful to them.” The group claims to have Kurds as well as Arabs as fighters and leaders.

Abu Abd al-Rahman commented on al-Mustafa’s relations with a number of other Iraqi armed groups:

- Army of Men of the Naqshabandi Order (a Sufi militant group; see *Terrorism Focus*, February 21, 2007; July 28, 2008): Al-Mustafa Army has good relations with this group and is ready to cooperate with them in all jihad activities.
- Gaza Martyrs Brigade: Three individuals broke from al-Mustafa two months ago and have since formed this group. “We wish them success, but we confirm there has not been any split in the group.”
- The Shi’a: Al-Mustafa Army has “no relations” with the Shi’a public and the group does not fight them. However, the group considers the “Persian Safavids” (a reference to Shi’a militias) to be their enemies.
- Ba’athists: Abu Abd al-Rahman denies the Mustafa Army is composed of Ba’athists, saying these are rumors designed to undermine the group, though it “does not belittle” the Ba’athists.
- The Islamic State of Iraq (al-Qaeda affiliated): The group has good relations with ISI and has worked with several of its field commanders in the past.

- The Sahwa (Awakening) Councils: These individuals have made mistakes by joining with the occupation forces, but the “door of repentance” remains open for them.

Though the group has suffered from security round-ups and financial shortfalls, it is still determined to resist efforts by the Kurdish Regional Government of northern Iraq and its peshmerga militias to annex parts of Ninawa like Sinjar, Rabi’ah and the Ninawa plain. “We have future plans to anticipate events and preempt any attempt to tear up the governate of Ninawa, which will have to be over our dead bodies...”

Iraq’s Muqtada al-Sadr Seeks Regional Influence with Visit to Ankara

By Babak Rahimi

Muqtada al-Sadr, the young Iraqi Shi’a cleric who has been studying to become an Ayatollah in the Iranian city of Qom since 2007, recently visited Turkey in a trip whose purpose is reported to have been a series of talks on Iraqi-Turkish security issues (al-Jazeera, May 2; IRNA, May 4). The discussions between al-Sadr and Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Recep Erdogan and Turkish President Abdullah Gul revolved mainly around the Kirkuk dispute, particularly the ethnic conflict between Shi’a Turkmen, Kurds and Sunni Arabs. The latter were encouraged to move to the city by Saddam in the 1980’s in order to attenuate Kurdish influence in the oil-rich region (Press TV [Tehran], May 4; *Azzaman* [Baghdad], May 4; Fars News [Tehran], May 4).

Although hardly his first visit to one of Iraq’s neighbors, al-Sadr’s latest trip takes place amidst a renewed surge of violence in Iraq and ongoing political rivalry between centralist and federalist factions fighting over the political and administrative structure of the country. The main source of conflict is a planned constitutional referendum, which would determine whether the Arab-dominated government of Baghdad or the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) of northern Iraq will assume control over Kirkuk. From the Kurdish side, Iraqi President (and ethnic Kurd) Jalal al-Talabani has announced that the Kurds will not give up their bid for control of the disputed oil region of Kirkuk (*Azzaman*, May 4). Centralist factions, who include both Sunni and

Shi’a Arab nationalists, are weary of Baghdad’s loss of territorial authority and the condition of their sectarian-ethnic constituencies in the Kirkuk region, which have seen a decline of influence since Kurds began to return to Kirkuk in 2003.

Given the centrality of the Kirkuk issue to the future of Iraq, al-Sadr is taking advantage of an opportune moment to enhance his legitimacy within the centralist factions that may see his trip to Turkey as a major boost to their cause. Al-Sadr could also be seeking to forge new alliances with regional leaders, like Erdogan, whose interests overlap with al-Sadr’s centralist vision of Iraq and include the protection of the Turkmen population in northern Iraq. In a sense, al-Sadr is not only trying to become a major political player in the faction-ridden parliamentary politics of Baghdad, but also to raise his own profile as a mediator among Iraq’s neighboring countries.

On the domestic front, it appears al-Sadr is becoming more active on the Iraqi political scene. While his annual call for mass demonstrations against U.S. occupation did not attract huge crowds, it did display his popularity among the impoverished sector of the Shi’a community (IRNA, March 29). He even reemerged on the regional scene last month when he defended Lebanese Hezbollah leader Shaykh Hassan Nasrallah against the Egyptian regime, which has accused the Shi’a Hezbollah of orchestrating a coup (IRNA, April 18).

For the most part, al-Sadr’s steady return to the political area may be a result of a weakening of hard-line Iranian control over his activity due to the upcoming presidential election in Iran, which has preoccupied rival conservative factions in Tehran. Since his decision to leave Iraq and continue with his seminary studies in Qom, al-Sadr has sought to achieve the kind of political clout that would eventually enhance his position as both a spiritual and political leader within the Iraqi Shi’a community (see *Terrorism Monitor*, February 25, 2008). With the victory of Iraq’s Shi’a Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki in the provincial elections, al-Sadr is now emboldened by a new alliance with the prime minister that he hopes will lead to a political revival (Press TV [Tehran], February 21).

On the streets of Qom, there are rumors that al-Sadr is close to receiving his ijaza (permission to practice ijthihad, or rational judgment), thus making him a mujtahid (scholar of Islamic law), a seminarian’s first step in becoming an Ayatollah. [1] As a Hujjat ul-Islam, a mid-

ranking cleric, al-Sadr could have the necessary spiritual authority to return to Iraq as a major religious leader ahead of the upcoming general election in December. As a calculating politician, al-Sadr knows the only way he can revive his political movement, which has been crippled since al-Maliki confronted his Mahdi Army in Basra and al-Sadr City in spring 2008, is with the combined backing of the clerical establishment in Najaf and the Shi'a streets of Baghdad and Iraq's southern regions.

It remains to be seen if the Sadrist movement will be revitalized in the post-election period, but for now, al-Sadr continues to promote "educational" activities among his newly formed organization, al-Mumahidun, and an end to armed militia activity in his movement (IRNA, March 21; May 4, see also *Terrorism Monitor*, September 4, 2008). In security terms, this is good news for the stability of Iraq.

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Notes:

1. Fieldwork observation, Qom, Iran, April 30, 2009.

Jihadis Discuss Plans to Seize Pakistan's Nuclear Arsenal

By Abdul Hameed Bakier

Urged by a senior al-Qaeda ideologue to take over Pakistan, members of jihadi internet forums have begun to examine the possibility of controlling Pakistan's nuclear weapons (al-faloja1.com, April 24). At the same time, jihadis continue to collect information on nuclear facilities around the globe, especially Israel's nuclear projects, waiting for an opportunity to perpetrate successful terrorist attacks against these facilities after massive terrorist attacks using conventional weapons failed to give rise to the global supremacy of Islamic law (al-faloja1.com, April 22).

On March 14, al-Fajr Media Center released a 29-page book entitled *Sharpening the Blades in the Battle against the Government and Army of Pakistan* by a senior al-Qaeda leader, Abu Yahya al-Libi (alboraq.info, May 3;

see *Terrorism Focus*, May 8). Al-Libi's work is designed to incite jihad against the Pakistani government. The author suggests Pakistan was founded in 1947 to uphold and implement Shari'a (Islamic law), but has since been plagued by successive corrupt governments that manipulated the Pakistani army and security services into opposing the implementation of Shari'a. Al-Libi cites numerous Hadiths and Quranic verses attesting to the religious obligation to oust the government and take over Pakistan.

Relative to al-Libi's provocative book, jihadi forums have focused on the future of Pakistan. A forum member nicknamed "Mohami al-Dawla" said no one had anticipated Pakistan would be overwhelmed by a jihadi surge to become a base for the revival of the Taliban's Islamic Emirate. After the tribal areas became a safe haven for the mujahideen retreating from Afghanistan after the 2001 U.S. invasion, Pakistan facilitated the reformation of mujahideen forces who are now "at two bow's lengths" from controlling Afghanistan. Although U.S. strategic policies are aimed at weakening Pakistan and imposing conditions in favor of its other allies in the region, the United States is helpless against possible Taliban control of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. With the mujahideen in control of the Swat valley, only 90 miles from the capital of Islamabad, al-Dawla maintains it's only a matter of time before the Taliban take full control of Pakistan. "This is not mythology or illusions. This is inevitable." Al-Dawla adds that the mujahideen should prepare countermeasures against U.S. plans to prevent the fall of Pakistan's 24-48 nuclear warheads to the mujahideen by seizing, dismantling and smuggling Pakistan's nuclear arsenal into those nations he describes as the "enemies of Islam."

By controlling Pakistan, al-Dawla is confident the mujahideen would not only control Pakistan's weapons of mass destruction, but would also gain control of copies of all the secret Pakistan-India agreements designed to prevent the targeting of nuclear facilities in any confrontation between the two countries. "By possessing highly sensitive maps and intelligence on India nuclear facilities, the enemies of Islam, the Hindus, would be very vulnerable." To handle the Pakistani nuclear weapons, the mujahideen need to build their military and intelligence capabilities by recruiting experienced people from the Pakistani government. "Some might think it's too early to talk about this subject, but a thorough assessment of the jihadi military situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan indicates the battlefield is ripe. Preplanning for nuclear arsenal control is a lot

better than planning for 30 years of jihad” concludes al-Dawla.

Other forum members described the importance of winning over Pakistani nuclear scientists such as Abdul Qadeer Khan, who is accused of promoting nuclear proliferation in the Islamic world and helping to transfer nuclear weapons technology to Libya. The mujahideen must protect such scientists from possible liquidation if the Taliban succeed in taking over Pakistan because even if the enemies of Islam dismantle and move Pakistan’s nuclear weapons, they would not leave behind the brains that developed these weapons.

In the same forum, members launched a new project of research on nuclear installations around the world entitled “Nuclear targets and facilities to be attacked.” The research begins by mapping the 17 nuclear facilities and installations spread over Pakistan. Part two of the project is to map the location of Israel’s 400 nuclear warheads.

Israeli nuclear and vital military and storage facilities are discussed in detail, including the Negev Nuclear Research Center at Dimona, the Naqab nuclear complex, and the Tel Nof air base. The section of research on Israel concludes by inciting Jordanian jihadis to attack Dimona, only 15 km from the Jordanian border.

Other countries examined by the jihadi forum members include France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Holland, Turkey, South Africa and the UK. For the United States and Russia, the jihadis posted several maps showing the locations of nuclear facilities and strategic naval bases, putting the number of Russian nuclear warheads at 14,000 and the number of U.S. warheads at 5,400.

Finally, the jihadis express their belief that suicide attacks against nuclear facilities would bring the enemies of Islam to their knees, and thus urge Salafi-Jihadis everywhere to conduct separate and more detailed research on the nuclear weapons facilities of the aforementioned countries.

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Europe’s Oldest Terrorist Organization: The Basque ETA Marks 50 Years of Operations

By Jules Stewart

On a December morning in 1973, an ear-splitting blast ripped through the fashionable Salamanca district of Madrid, shaking the walls of this reporter’s home. The first frenzied reports on the Spanish state-controlled media spoke of a gas main explosion. A journalist’s instinct said this was not so; political tensions were running high in the final years of the Franco dictatorship, the aged general was suffering from severe Parkinson’s disease and his frail voice was barely audible in broadcasts. Everyone impatiently awaited the end of four decades of a tyranny that still had two years to run, and everyone expected trouble.

When the dust cleared, it emerged that the Basque guerrilla organisation Euskadi ta Askatasuna (Basque Homeland and Liberty – ETA) had detonated a bomb under the street, blowing up the car of Prime Minister Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco, Franco’s heir apparent, known as the “Ogre” for his extremist hard-line policies. It was generally agreed that had Carrero Blanco survived, Spain was in for a messy post-Franco period. [1] The banned socialist and communist parties, backed with the muscle of their trades unions, were beginning to resurface after nearly 40 years underground. Tensions were running high and there were widespread fears of bloody street clashes under a future Carrero Blanco régime. That night, stocks of champagne were depleted in the wine shops of the Basque Country, though this was the last time one of ETA’s violent actions was to win widespread popular support across Spain. [2]

Origins of ETA

This year ETA celebrates its 50th birthday, making it Europe’s longest surviving terrorist organisation. ETA’s founders were not urban guerrillas or militants of the revolutionary proletariat. They were well-heeled, middle-class university students from Bilbao’s Deusto University, whose aim was not to launch a campaign of violence. They took their inspiration from Sabino Arana, the 19th century father of Basque nationalism and founder of the Basque Nationalist Party (Partido Nacionalista Vasco - PNV). The students were angered by the Franco regime’s political oppression, but also by

what they perceived to be a plot to stamp out the Basque identity, as embodied in some of Arana's more fanciful proclamations. For instance, "We, the Basques, must avoid mortal contagion, maintain firm our faith in our ancestors and the serious religiosity that distinguishes us, and purify our customs, in the past so healthy and exemplary, and now so infected and at the point of corruption by the influence of those who have come from outside." [3]

The Basque region was granted autonomy by the Spanish Republic in 1936 and formed its own government and army. Basque resistance to Franco's rebel troops in the 1936-39 Spanish civil war collapsed following the carpet bombing of the Basque city of Guernica by the German Luftwaffe and Italian Aviazione Legionaria in 1937. After the war, Franco took his revenge on the Basques by declaring Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa, part of the intransigent Basque hinterland, "punished provinces." The Basque language was banned and all other manifestations of Basque culture were proscribed. The provinces of Vitoria and Navarre (the latter not officially part of the Basque Country) had gone over to the fascist cause early in the war and were spared the ravages of Franco's Falangists.

In 1959, a small group of Basque students managed to obtain government permission to travel abroad on the pretext of participating in a sporting event. They went to Paris to meet with José Antonio Aguirre, the president of the Basque government in exile, and seek his support for a campaign of political activism. The student delegation was kept waiting for hours and when Aguirre finally emerged, he greeted them effusively with "wonderful news" - all the defeated Republic's political parties now in exile had at last agreed on a common platform. Struggling to conceal their dismay with this apparent demise of the Basque nationalist movement, the students returned to Spain, where some began to find inspiration in armed guerrilla movements like Israel's Irgun and the Irish Republican Army. Thus began ETA's transition from graffiti to bullets. [4]

ETA has never had a problem, then or now, recruiting young militants to its cause. In the Franco years, any attempt to raise the Basque flag or distribute nationalist leaflets was met with a merciless police crackdown, which often included torture sessions in the basement of Madrid's Security Headquarters. Hence there was never a shortage of angry youth happy to take up arms for the cause. The fledgling band of revolutionaries was able to organize and arm itself thanks to donations from

Basque exiles in Mexico and Venezuela. Later on, bank robberies and extortion became routine fund-raising tactics.

ETA drew its first blood in 1968 when a notorious police torturer, Melitón Manzanás, was gunned down outside his home in the border town of Irún. The government's response was to impose a "state of exception," effectively suspending constitutional guarantees, first in the Basque country and then in all of Spain. That same month some 600 arrests were made in the Basque provinces. The round-ups carried on for months and the following year another 2,000 people were detained, allegedly tortured and convicted of crimes against the state. The ETA activists, who at their peak never numbered more than a few hundred hardcore militants, had now acquired the status of a violent threat to the Franco régime. [5]

International Connections

Leaving aside the early financial contributions from abroad, it is worth pointing out that ETA's alleged links to terrorist groups in Latin America, North Africa and elsewhere are tenuous and sporadic. The Basques have reportedly helped train some FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) guerrillas in exchange for cash and the Colombian terrorists have unsuccessfully tried to persuade ETA to carry out killings on their behalf in Spain, but the relationship is peripheral to ETA's strategic objectives (*El País*, July 30, 2008; see also *Terrorism Monitor*, January 23). ETA is not concerned with world revolution and the liberation of the proletariat. It is a narrowly-focused movement fighting to achieve an independent Basque homeland free from "Spanish pollution" and embracing an almost hysterical doctrine of "racial purity". The only mantra it shares with other guerrilla groups is an intense dislike of the United States. This hostility, however, is not based on accusations of imperialism but rather of betrayal. After the Second World War, the Basque government in exile fervently expected the United States to depose Franco, who had sided with Hitler in the war despite declaring Spanish neutrality. Instead, what they got was four U.S. military bases on Spanish soil and an aid package from the Eisenhower administration that rescued Spain from economic collapse. [6]

Given the ferocity of the police crackdown, one wonders how ETA managed to survive and indeed intensify its campaign of violence. The answer is the French connection. The French Basque region provided refuge for ETA militants on the run and a safe haven

to regroup and plan attacks south of the border. “ETA operated across the border between Spain and France with something approaching impunity,” says the Basque journalist and ETA historian Iñigo Gurruchaga. “It was in the latter country that their leadership operated, apparently unhindered by French security forces.” [7] ETA considers this French region a part of Euskalherria, or the Greater Basque Country. In fact, one of their slogans is 4+3 = 1, referring to the four Spanish and three French Basque provinces. The French government takes a somewhat different view, yet for years Paris refused to comply with Spanish demands to hand over ETA guerrillas holed up in French territory. During the Franco period, France turned a deaf ear to Madrid’s demands on the grounds that it could not in good conscience deport asylum seekers to a fascist dictatorship. It is only in recent years that ETA militants have been denied a safe haven across the border. Thanks to French police work, a number of major ETA figures have been arrested and sent back to Spain. This has undeniably weakened the movement, perhaps terminally, though there remains the deeply-rooted challenge of grassroots support.

The Political Dimension

Gone are the days when ETA’s now illegal political arm, Herri Batasuna, could command 15% or more of the vote in Basque elections. Last March, radical parties won only four of 75 seats in the regional Basque parliament. The result also marked a crushing setback for the Basque nationalist PNV, which had held power for nearly 30 years (*El Correo*, March 27). Socialist Party leader Patxi López was sworn in as president of a government that will rule the Basque region in coalition with the conservative Popular Party. For the moment, the Spanish government has no plans to renew peace talks with the guerrillas. Sporadic attempts to achieve a lasting ceasefire have been ongoing for years and the last round failed in 2006, when ETA planted a massive bomb in Madrid Airport (Reuters, April 21). ETA still believes it is negotiating from a position of strength and refuses to budge from its demands for a referendum on Basque independence. The Spanish government correctly argues that this is unconstitutional and refuses to open a dialogue on greater regional independence.

Conclusion

The ETA has killed more than 825 people since the start of its campaign of violence in the late 1960s. More will undoubtedly fall until a sizeable segment of the Basque people is persuaded to withdraw its tacit support for the

terrorists. Most of the victims have been members of the security forces or figures linked to the government, but the Basque terrorists have not shied away from the occasional civilian atrocity. Nevertheless, the suspected beating of an ETA supporter in police custody, or the transfer of an ETA convict to a prison outside the Basque Country, are events capable of detonating mass street protests in San Sebastián or one of the industrial towns of Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa.

ETA retains the capacity to inflict isolated acts of murder and destruction. It has never had the ability to destabilize the Spanish political system, but documents seized in the recent arrest of Jurdan Martitegi Lizaso, the military leader of ETA, indicated the group was about to begin a new series of attacks on the new Socialist government of the Basque region (*La Voz de Galicia*, April 23; *Euro Weekly [Spain]*, April 30). Madrid will now have to decide whether to soften its approach to Basque nationalism without capitulating to the terrorists, or accept separatist violence as a long-term thorn in the side of Spanish democracy.

Jules Stewart is an author and freelance journalist based in London, who wrote widely on ETA during the 20 years he worked in Spain.

Notes

1. Antonio Elorza, *La Historia de ETA*, Edición Temas de Hoy, 2000, p. 262.
2. Ander Landaburu, *Cambio 16 Basque* country correspondent, in conversation with the author, December, 1974.
3. Sabino Arana, *La Patria* no. 19, 1890.
4. Iñigo Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists*, Hurst & Co., 2009, p. 177.
5. Eugenio Etxebeste, *Veinte Años Después*, Argitaletxe Hiru, 1994, p. 59.
6. Gurruchaga, op. cit., p. 175
7. *Ibid*, p.181

The FM Mullahs and the Taliban’s Propaganda War in Pakistan

By Mukhtar A Khan

The scenic Swat valley is thundering with both aerial bombardments and fiery Taliban FM radio sermons. In a large-scale military operation dubbed Operation Rah-e-Raast (Operation Straight

Path), the Pakistani army is hitting Taliban targets with gunship helicopters while the Taliban respond with AK-47s and their powerful propaganda radio broadcasts. More than a million people have fled the scene of battle and millions more are trapped inside the valley. While the government has asked the local people to help the military in identifying Taliban hideouts, the Taliban have been broadcasting warnings against supporting the military. Through their pirate FM transmitters, the Taliban have demanded that local parliamentarians, security forces and other government officials resign from their positions as a mark of protest against the military operations; otherwise they should be prepared for a jihad directed against them. The Taliban radio broadcasters, popularly known as “FM Mullahs,” continuously transmit anti-American and anti-government sermons, calling democracy “un-Islamic” and those practicing it “infidels.” In their fiery radio speeches, the Taliban preachers have demanded that the non-Muslim minorities of Malakand pay jizya (protection tax) or face jihad. In the same tone, they have issued warnings to local NGOs, musicians and anybody else involved in “un-Islamic” activities. Those defying their orders are butchered, and daily announcements of the details of their deaths are broadcast on FM channels.

The Original FM Mullah

It was the Swat Taliban leader, Maulana Fazlullah, who first gained international attention through his FM radio broadcasts and earned the nickname “FM Mullah.” However, the use of pirate radio stations in the region began in the Khyber Tribal Agency. It was Haji Namdar, leader of Tanzim Amr bil Maroof wa Nehi Anil Munkir (Suppression of Vice and the Promotion of Virtue), who established a local extremist FM radio station in December 2003 (*Dawn* [Karachi], December 2, 2004). Haji Namdar hired a firebrand Deobandi Sunni cleric, Mufti Munir Shakir, who preached a strict version of Islam on his radio which infuriated Muslims belonging to the Bareilvi Sufi order. Consequently, the Sufis opened up a rival FM channel headed by Pir Saifur Rahman. The opposing views on rival channels resulted in violent clashes in the Bara Tehsil (county) of the Khyber tribal agency in early 2006. The war of words in the air culminated into a battle on the ground in which scores of people were killed and hundreds of others were displaced (*The News* [Islamabad], October 25, 2006). The fighting compelled the local people and government authorities to expel both varieties of FM Mullahs from the region.

However, the proliferation of pirate FM radio stations did not stop. Several other small FM channels propagating sectarian views emerged. The vacuum left by Mufti Munir Shakir was soon filled by a more militant cleric known as Mangal Bagh. He re-organized the Mufti’s religious organization, Lashkar-e-Islam, and started recruiting new fighters while terrorizing his opponents with radio sermons. He started issuing fatwas (religious decrees) against his opponents, demanding the implementation of his brand of Islam by force when necessary. Mangal Bagh developed a parallel administration in the region and openly challenged the writ of the government through his influential broadcasts.

It was Maulana Fazlullah, however, who excelled in the effective use of radio and ruled over the Swat valley from his station in Mamdheri (also known as Imam Dheri). In late 2005, he started his FM service and within the short span of one year, Fazlullah was a household name throughout the Swat valley. He was extremely popular amongst the local women, who donated cash and jewelry for his madrassa in Mamdheri (Newsline [Karachi], August 2007). The common people of the area looked to him for guidance and sought his resolution of their long-standing disputes. The tide turned when he asked the people and the government to consider his FM sermons as the only and final authority on important questions. Maulana Fazlullah politicized his broadcasts in order to gain maximum power and influence in the area. Fighters were recruited and organized by receiving instructions on the radio. Fazlullah sent a wave of terror through opposing politicians and government functionaries and listening to his broadcasts became mandatory for the local public. If someone missed a broadcast, they often felt the need to ask others what the FM Mullah had said that particular day. Who is to be flogged or beheaded next? Who was forgiven and who was punished today?

Radicalizing the Pashtun

Maulana Shah Dauran is another FM Mullah in Swat who is famous for his harsh and derogatory denunciations of Pakistani politicians, the United States and the coalition of nations involved in the war on terrorism. He typically parodies the Pakistani leadership and specializes in character assassination (*The News*, January 5).

A Taliban leader in Darra Adam Khel, Commander Tariq Afridi, has recently launched a pirate FM station which is also considered to be one of the most influential in the area. It is a short range broadcast that can be

heard only within a 2 kilometer radius, but its words are taken very seriously. Tariq Afrida has been threatening tribesmen with dire consequences if they dare to raise a lashkar (tribal militia) against the Taliban or help the government against the Taliban in any way (*Dawn* [Karachi], April 25).

Local Taliban leaders air their point-of-view on the same Darra channel which is then transmitted through other media to the wider community, enabling the radical preachers to control the area by spreading fear and intimidation (*Dawn* [Karachi], April 10). Besides the tribal areas and the Swat valley, there is a growing tendency to launch pirate FM stations in the urban centers of the North-West Frontier Province. Big cities like Charsadda, Mardan and Swabi have more than a hundred Islamist pirate radio stations. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) estimates the number of these FM Mullahs to be around 300. Most of these Mullahs are highly influential; some of them are even members of parliament. Maulana Abdullah Shah's FM station in Charsadda and Maulana Tayyeb's radio station in Panj Pir are very popular.

These FM channels have served the cause of the Taliban in radicalizing Pashtun society and winning them legitimacy for terrorist activities carried out in the name of religion. They use the airwaves to incite people to jihad, redefine the role of women and intimidate the public by announcing the names of tribal elders, "spies" and security officials who are to be killed or hanged (*Dawn* [Karachi], May 4).

FM as an Effective Medium in Winning the Propaganda War

Historically and culturally, Pashtuns are a radio society. Now they are an FM society. To win over the hearts and minds of Pashtuns, one would have to talk to them through the medium of FM radio. In the words of Marshall McLuhan, the medium is the message, and the Taliban have been wisely exploiting this medium. These channels are cost effective in sending powerful messages to the immediate local community. A 10 watt FM channel costing only \$200 is good enough to be clearly heard across the village. Launching an FM channel takes little technical skill. Semi-literate Taliban need only a transmitter, amplifier and a car or bike battery to send their propaganda into each home of a village. All this equipment is readily available in the local market. FM radio sets are also very cheap compared

to shortwave and medium-wave brand radios. Poor people in FATA and the Frontier Province prefer to buy a cheap FM transistor radio at a cost of only a dollar as opposed to a shortwave receiver, which can cost 10 to 100 times as much. And now people often do not need to buy an FM radio as most cell phones have a built-in FM radio. These local FM broadcasts are regularly tuned in by public transport vehicles. [1] The local Pashtun population prefers to listen to and rely on the news contained in the local broadcast as compared to broadcasts beamed from thousands of miles away. They want local information in local dialects.

The Taliban are smart enough to have exploited these outlets in their propaganda war against the U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan. They incite the local youth to rise up for jihad against the foreign armies and urge elderly men and women to give their moral and financial support to the cause of jihad. Typically, the broadcasts are made from mosques and madrassas where hundreds of men are present to listen to the FM Mullahs in person while women listen in their homes. The broadcasts are highly interactive - not only do men ask questions of the mullahs in these live broadcasts but women also send questions to be answered by the mullahs, who have successfully won a majority of the women over to their side by asking men to give women their legal share of inheritances, especially land.

All the FM Mullahs' broadcasts start with the recitation of the Quran and its interpretation. They soon switch to politics and hate sermons against the U.S. and Pakistani governments and their militaries. Their political and ideological agenda is justified by their own interpretation of the religion. However, they may refer to Pashtun culture or nationalism if it suits their goals and ambitions.

The Taliban are not shy about exploiting other traditional and modern media tools like night-letters (unsigned leaflets), pamphlets, CDs, DVDs and mobile messaging. They also make efforts to appear live on other electronic media to voice their unedited propaganda. To give legitimacy to his far-fetched claim of responsibility for the April 3 murders of 14 people in Binghamton, New York, Baitullah Mahsud, chief of the Pakistani Taliban, contacted the Pashto language Deewa Radio, funded by the U.S. government's Voice of America. In the same week, Baitullah used VOA to threaten attacks on the White House and other targets in Washington D.C. (*The News*, April 5, see also *Terrorism Monitor*, April 24).

How to Challenge Taliban Propaganda?

Homeopathy has a long-established principle of “Let likes cure likes.” In the same sense, the Taliban’s FM propaganda can be challenged with the same FM radio tools operated by local people unaffiliated with the Taliban. Jamming the Taliban’s FM transmitters can provide temporary relief but it is not a solution, owing to the very nature of these channels. Jamming could interfere with the intelligence system, as some of these FM transmitters illegally use the same frequencies allocated for the police and security agencies, ranging from 88.00 to 108.00 MHz. Confiscation of equipment is also not a permanent solution. The problem is that the broadcasters can easily resurface. An FM channel can be operated even from a motor bike on the run. One can pack the whole transmitter in a brief case and re-launch it from another location unless the broadcasters lose support and popularity among the local people. PEMRA officials confiscated 180 illegal FM transmitters in the NWFP last year, but their number is still on the rise. [2] Confiscation or jamming may create public anger which could further be exploited by the Taliban against the Pakistani and American governments.

Conclusion

The best way to fight the illegal broadcasts is to launch local non-Taliban FM stations, possibly housed in the traditional Pashtun hujras (community halls). Ideally, there should be one small and simple FM channel for each village in FATA and the NWFP, operated by respected local people who may handle regional issues with cultural sensitivity. These stations could deal in an interactive way with subject matters like farming, local trade and business, health, education and employment. For women and youth, there could be special programs related to their interests, such as embroidery, child care, folklore, fashion, poetry, comedy, drama, traditional sports and quiz competitions. Once the local people are engaged positively and feel connected and empowered, they will resist any temptation to cause destruction in the name of religion or nationalism. Already some non-Taliban FM channels in both the NWFP and FATA have demonstrated success. In fact Radio Khyber in the Jamrud area of the Khyber tribal agency has been so popular among the local public that it has almost replaced Mangal Bagh’s pro-Taliban FM station. It airs live discussion on issues ranging from politics and education to music and culture. Radio Burraq is another such FM channel which is very popular in Peshawar and Mardan. FM Dilbar is yet another

example, headquartered in Charsadda. Even Pakistan’s military has established several FM channels, including “Mera Swat” (My Swat) in the Swat valley, but they remain comparatively unsuccessful because local people want community ownership and local labeling of these channels.

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Notes:

1. Author’s interviews with public transport vehicle operators and passengers.
2. Ibid.