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TALIBAN PREDICT PRESIDENT OBAMA'S "COLONIAL STRATEGY" WILL LEAD TO AMERICAN COLLAPSE

In the midst of extensive coverage of President Obama's decision to send another 30,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan, the Taliban's response was little noticed. A formal statement from the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was carried by the Afghan Islamic Press on December 2.

The statement describes the President's decision to pursue a "colonial strategy" as one taken under pressure from "Pentagon generals, U.S. neo-conservatives and U.S. major investors." While protecting the "colonial interest of American investors," it ignores the economic and financial crisis facing the American people.

The statement suggests that the increase in troops will only result in an increase in casualties as the Muslim people of Afghanistan consider the Karzai regime to be "depraved puppets of the invaders."

The Taliban leadership employs the statement as part of a continuous effort to distance themselves from the global jihad of al-Qaeda. "We do not have any bases in Pakistan and do not need to have any bases outside Afghanistan... The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has repeatedly clarified to the international community that we do not intend harming anyone in the world. Therefore, the



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presence of the aggressive foreign forces in Afghanistan has nothing to do with world security.”

The Taliban response ends by reminding American officials that a continuation of their strategy will result in the sure collapse of America, as happened “to other boastful invaders in the past.”

In a further statement carried on the Taliban’s Pashto-language Shamat website, the Taliban state their belief that America’s allies have told President Obama “frankly and firmly” that they are no longer interested in pursuing the war in Afghanistan and are not prepared to send new troops.

The statement goes on to mock the President’s announcement that he would send 30,000 new American troops to Afghanistan:

Obama and the American people should know that the former Soviet Union sent many more troops to Afghanistan and that their puppets were much more powerful and warmongering than the current puppets. However, since Afghanistan is the graveyard of the invaders and colonialists and this nation has the historic honor of bringing down invaders and those who claim to be pharaohs [i.e. tyrants], therefore the Americans should also start the countdown for facing the same fate.

Noticeably absent from the Taliban statements was the racial invective found in earlier Taliban references to President Obama. This may be part of Mullah Omar’s more conciliatory approach and the movement’s new effort to position itself as a legitimate and responsible alternative to the corrupt Karzai government.

The Kabul government took a more optimistic approach to the President’s commitment of more troops. Afghan Foreign Minister Rangin Dadfar Spanta said the additional deployment was exactly what the government was looking for, “so that we ourselves should eventually take the responsibility and our guests can return to their homes safe and sound as soon as possible” (Tolo TV [Kabul], December 2).

AFRICAN UNION PEACEKEEPERS WARN OF AL-QAEDA PRESENCE IN SOMALIA

The hard-pressed Ugandan and Burundian troops of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) are the

last line of defense for Somalia’s Transitional Federal Government (TFG), which now controls only a few neighborhoods of Mogadishu. With the recent defeat of rival Islamist militia Hizb al-Islam, the radical al-Shabaab movement has emerged as the main challenger to the TFG.

The African Union’s special representative for Somalia, former Kenyan MP Wafula Athanas Wamunyinyi, has issued dire warnings of an al-Qaeda takeover of Somalia, “considering the grip they have on the country” (*New Vision* [Kampala], December 3). Wamunyinyi says al-Shabaab has recruited 1,200 fighters in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Tanzania, Kenya, Sudan, Uganda and the United States. “With the involvement of foreign fighters, we need to adopt a new approach towards the conflict in Somalia, away from the perception that these are clans fighting.” Kenyans are reported to represent half this force, being recruited from the same ethnic-Somali community in northeast Kenya that the TFG is also drawing on for recruits (*New Vision*, December 4).

Wamunyinyi claims that al-Qaeda is operating training camps in Somalia, and named several foreigners who now hold leading positions in al-Shabaab:

- Saudi Arabian Shaykh Muhammad Abu Fa’id is the group’s financier and “manager.”
- Abu Musa Mombasa is a Pakistani who has replaced the late Saleh Ali Nahbhan as the head of security and training operations for al-Shabaab.
- The American Abu Mansur al-Amriki heads the finance and payroll department of the foreign mujahideen.
- Sudanese national Mohamoud Mujajir is in charge of suicide bombing operations (*New Vision*, December 3).

A Ugandan AMISOM officer, Major Bahoku Barigye, reported that he had personally spoken to three al-Shabaab members from Uganda, who said they knew where he lived in Kampala and threatened his family. One of the militants told Major Barigye he was a member of the Alliance of Democratic Forces, an Islamist militant group that has operated along the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) since 1996 (see *Terrorism Monitor*, December 5, 2007).

AMISOM commander, Major General Nathan Mugisha (Uganda), is less emphatic regarding al-Qaeda's physical presence in Somalia. "I think there's a relationship between activities here and al-Qaeda... There's mutual support and I think the way they behave is similar" (AFP, November 28).

The question is whether reports of a substantial al-Qaeda presence are intelligence-driven or politically inspired as a means of obtaining greater military and financial support for a mission that is badly undermanned and underfunded. Still 3,000 troops short of its mandated force of 8,000, AMISOM will soon receive reinforcements from Djibouti; but Ghana, Nigeria, Malawi and Sierra Leone have yet to send the units they promised.

New Hezbollah Manifesto Emphasizes Political Role in a United Lebanon

By Rafid Fadhil Ali

On a giant screen in his stronghold in Southern Beirut, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah announced his party's new manifesto on November 30 (Lebanonfiles.com, November 30). Since the war between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006, Nasrallah has been avoiding public appearances. Even his press conferences have been held via video conference. The new Hezbollah document is the second of its kind since the emergence of the Shi'a Islamist party in the mid-1980s. The new manifesto bore the title "The Political Document of Hezbollah" and was agreed upon during the party conference concluded a few days earlier (Al-Manar, November 29). The document outlined the aims and policies of Hezbollah and its military wing, al-Moqawama al-Islamiyah (The Islamic Resistance).

Hezbollah started in the 1980s as an Islamic revolutionary organization calling for an Iranian-like Islamic state in multi-sect Lebanon. In 1992 the party joined Lebanon's parliament and now has alliances among the other sects. In 2005 it joined the government and has been part of every cabinet over the last four years.

The first Hezbollah manifesto was announced from southern Beirut on February 16, 1985. That document was called "The Open Message." The party defined itself then as part of a "nation" led by Iran and its then-supreme leader, Ayatollah Rohollah Khomeini. The message called on the Lebanese to adopt Islamic rule and even invited Lebanese Christians to convert to Islam. The message also called for a continuous jihad against Israel. [1]

Unlike the 1985 manifesto, the recent document contained very few Islamic terms or expressions and had no indication of the Shiite identity of the party. The manifesto is divided into three parts: Domination and Revival, Lebanon, and Palestine.

Within the first paragraph of the introduction, the document leaves no doubt that Hezbollah and the Islamic Resistance are one in the same. The introduction begins with two verses from the Quran that promote jihad. The text then builds on what it sees as the contrast between a course of resistance and refusal on the one hand, and a course of American-Israeli domination and Istikbar (arrogance) on the other. The resistance is progressing despite existing challenges, while American-Israeli domination is retreating, politically and militarily. The introduction claims that the recent international economic crisis will affect the status of the United States as the only superpower in the world.

The first part of the document presents Hezbollah's version of history from the Second World War to the present. The terminology and the analysis look more like the product of a leftist movement than an Islamic one. America, according to Hezbollah, has had a domination plan: "The American strategy, which goes along with the capitalist economic plan, has a global nature and there is no limit to its greed."

The Bush administration is heavily criticized, as is the neo-conservative movement and the War on Terror. "That administration initiated equality between the concept of terror and the concept of the resistance in order to deny the resistance its legitimacy.... Terror has become a pretext for American domination, which used tools like rendition and detention without fair trial, as in Guantanamo."

While indicating that America is the origin of every terror in the world, the manifesto says nothing about the Obama administration, even though it has been in

office for a year. President Barack Obama is mentioned only once and then only as George Bush's successor.

In the Middle East, Hezbollah analyzes what it sees as an American strategy—one which includes supporting Israel and the Arab dictatorships, psychological and media wars against the peoples of the region, establishing military bases in strategic spots and inciting civil wars. This chapter was heavily covered by the influential pan-Arab al-Jazeera network, in a report titled “Nasrallah: America is the origin of terror” (al-Jazeera, November 30).

In the second chapter, Hezbollah indicates its basic political principles:

- Israel is a threat to Lebanon. Hezbollah should keep arming itself to defend Lebanon and this should also be part of the state's strategy. The political opponents of Hezbollah have always called for the party to be disarmed.
- In order to have real democracy in Lebanon, political sectarianism should be eliminated. [2] Until that goal is achieved, political agreements should be the basis of the political system and government, not just election results.
- The party opposes federalism and stresses the rejection of any divisions in this small country (10,400 square kilometers). Upset with the increasing demographic gravity of the Shi'a, some among the once-dominant Christian community have called for a federalist system.

These principles, particularly the first two, were strongly criticized by politicians from the mainly Sunni and Christian majority bloc in Lebanon's parliament (*Al-Hayat*, December 2)

On regional aspects, the manifesto called for relations with Syria to return to normal after the breach in relations over the last few years. Iran is mentioned only in the second chapter, in which appreciation is expressed for Iran's role as a backer of Arab issues and the Palestinian cause. The document indicates that the differences existing between Iran and some of the Arab nations serve American and Israeli interests, and called for these differences to be resolved.

In the third chapter, the party stresses the right of the Palestinians to resist occupation by all means. The

document condemns and opposes peace negotiations in principle. Hezbollah goes on to pledge not to recognize Israel even if the whole world does.

The content of Hezbollah's discourse has clearly changed from the radical Shiite rhetoric of the 1980s to that used by a classical revolutionary movement. However, the main aspects of the group's regional and international strategy have changed little. In Lebanon, the party has chosen to stress its increasing military and political power and make it part of its doctrine.

Notes:

1. See Tawfiq al-Mudaini, *Amal wa Hezbollah*, al-Ahali, Damascus, 1999. See also Waddah Sharara, *Dawlat Hezbollah* (The State of Hezbollah), second edition, An-Nahar, Beirut, 1997.
2. The political system in Lebanon is based on the concept of sectarian power-sharing. Accordingly, the president's post is occupied by a Christian, the premiership by a Sunni Muslim and the post of the parliamentary speaker by a Shi'a Muslim. Since 1989 the 120 seats of parliament are divided equally between Christians and Muslims. Every sect has a designated number of seats in the cabinet. This system is based on the percentage of the population of the various communities at independence. Muslims, especially the Shi'a, have been increasingly critical of the system as they believe they are under-represented.

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Jihadis Debate Growing Rift Between al-Qaeda and the Taliban

By Abdul Hameed Bakier

Taliban leader Mullah Omar's statement on the occasion of the end of Ramadan festivities, published in *al-Somod* Islamic e-magazine, was seen by many Salafi-Jihadi forum participants as a retreat from true Salafi-Jihadi practices and a sign of

unacceptable moderation and concession to the United States and the Western world in general (alsomod.org, September 19). Jihadi forum members discussed Mullah Omar's Eid statement in anticipation of a major rift between al-Qaeda and the Taliban (muslm.net November 25).

The most contentious points in Mullah Omar's statement from a Salafi-Jihadi perspective are as follows:

- The Mullah promises social reforms. "We would like to say, we are victims of the black propaganda of the enemy media. This has created doubts between us and a number of countries of the world. They have wrongly depicted us as a force being against education and women's rights." The Salafi-Jihadis of al-Qaeda, as the name suggests, represent an ideology that regards any reform as deviation from the true path of the Salaf, the pious first three generations of Muslims.
- Mullah Omar's determination to hold Taliban members accountable for wrongful behavior and the liquidation of rogue elements within the movement also applies to al-Qaeda members in Afghanistan, for the latter are obliged to abide by the Muslim Amir's rulings. The directive would strain al-Qaeda's freedom to conduct terrorist operations. The Islamic Emirate "obliges all mujahideen to strictly observe the rules and regulations so that all mujahideen will continue to wage jihad as sincere sons of the country for the prosperity of the masses under the framework of Islamic Shari'a ...The Islamic Emirate considers the purge of its ranks and self-accountability an everlasting and necessary obligation."
- Mullah Omar's emphasis on international norms and his promises to establish friendly bilateral relations with other nations and respect the sovereignty of its neighbors are in stark contrast with al-Qaeda's global war against "Jews and Crusaders." According to the Mullah, "We consider the whole region as a common home against colonialism and want to play our role in the peace and stability of the region. We assure all countries that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, as a responsible force, will not extend its hand to cause jeopardy to others as it itself does not allow others to jeopardize us."

- Islam rejects extremism. The Taliban is only concerned with expelling foreign troops from Afghanistan.

However, parts of the statement appear to contradict Mullah Omar's remarks regarding Osama bin Laden. The Mullah argues that his decision to grant Bin Laden safe haven was based on principles. The opposing parties should have expressed their point in a logical manner without provocations. "Afghan ethics and religion forbid us from extraditing Bin Laden. The man participated with us in jihad against the Soviets and spent his money helping us and our Muslim jihadi guests. They are all welcome as long as they respect our traditions and law," says the Mullah (al-Somod, November 5; muslm.net, November 13).

A debate in one of the jihadi forums was triggered by a posting entitled "Al-Qaeda's agenda is different than that of the Taliban's Mullah Omar" (muslm.net November 25). A forum member, nicknamed "Asif al-Zubay," said the Taliban's first and last mission is to rid Afghanistan of U.S. occupation and extend the Taliban's control over all Afghanistan as well as win the support of Islamic countries. "This is a clear indication the Taliban agenda is shifting away from al-Qaeda's global war strategy against Islamic and non-Islamic countries," says al-Zubay. Other chatters criticized Mullah Omar for declaring the Taliban's intention to recognize Islamic countries after the liberation of Afghanistan, contradicting the Salafi-Jihadi/al-Qaeda principle of not recognizing the "infidel-ruled" Arab and Islamic states. "We must not look for excuses for what the Mullah said. The Mullah and the Taliban leaders must know that we are angry and denounce his stated shift in policy. We demand that the Mullah apologize or renounce the statement. We expect Shaykh Osama to denounce the statement as well," said one jihadi forum member whose style of Arabic suggests Iraqi origins.

Other more realistic jihadi forum members do not believe that the Taliban and al-Qaeda are two sides of the same coin, and doubt that Mullah Omar will ever rule Afghanistan again. Even if the Taliban forces the Coalition to withdraw, that would be a big setback for al-Qaeda, which has failed so far to bring the Taliban to Salafism. The Taliban eventually realized its entire misfortune stems from al-Qaeda and the safe haven extended to Osama bin Laden. Having learnt this lesson, Mullah Omar will no longer allow any actions that would harm the sovereignty of Afghanistan. If the Taliban prevails, al-Qaeda will have to either obey

the Amir or, most probably, in some other members' opinion, break ranks and fight Taliban rule. In case the Coalition leaves Afghanistan, al-Qaeda still has the religious justification to maintain an international terror campaign in the guise of "offensive jihad." Forum members concluded that al-Qaeda and the Taliban differ in the following areas: political agenda; strategies; military techniques; and prospects for the future, as al-Qaeda does not appear to have any future plans. Moreover, the terrorist activities of al-Qaeda have not only led to the collapse of the nascent Islamic state in Afghanistan, but were a disservice to the Muslim cause all over the world.

Optimistic Salafi-Jihadi chatters believe the Taliban and al-Qaeda enjoy a cooperative relationship. Al-Qaeda works globally, whereas the Taliban offer an incubator for the group and a refuge for Muslims in general. Taliban Afghanistan is a safe haven and a launch pad that will lead to an eventual bright future for Muslims. Afghanis' love for Islam and Arabs is genuine, as is evident from their sacrifices for Arabs on the battlefields of Afghanistan.

The impact of Mullah Omar's statement still echoes in jihadi circles and forums. If the Mullah's policy revisions prove to be genuine, al-Qaeda's operations would be disrupted significantly. If the attempts of al-Qaeda supporters to mitigate the repercussions of Mullah Omar's statement fail, Mullah Omar might become, in al-Qaeda's eyes, the "Shaykh Sharif" of Afghanistan. [1]

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Notes:

1. Somalia's Islamist president, Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmad, was formerly a co-chairman of the Islamic Courts Union and commander of the Alliance to Re-liberate Somalia (ARS). Since joining the government, he has been roundly denounced by both al-Qaeda and the al-Qaeda influenced al-Shabaab movement, which has tried several times to kill him.

Military Victory in South Waziristan or the Beginning of a Long War?

By *Imtiaz Ali*

There is hardly any doubt regarding the critical importance of the military operation in Pakistan's troubled South Waziristan tribal agency, which is considered to be the epicenter of jihad and the nerve center of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and their allies. The latest military operation started in mid-October and has been widely described as successful in capturing most of the TTP bases in the difficult terrain along the Afghanistan border. After years of setbacks and failures in containing the rising power of the militants, Pakistan's military has finally managed to dismantle militant bases in this critically important region, famous for its rebel movements and legendary tales of resistance. To encourage his soldiers, Pakistan's military chief, General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani, went in person to advanced positions in Waziristan. Pakistan's western allies, who have long been critical of its military performance against Taliban militants, have also shown appreciation for Pakistan's military performance. Even President Obama mentioned the Waziristan military offensive in his much talked about December 1 speech on America's Afghanistan policy at the U.S. military academy at West Point, in which he referred to extremist militants as a "common threat" to both the United States and Pakistan.

Pakistan recently announced that its military has completed the offensive in the tribal region of South Waziristan and that military operations may now be expanded to the Orakzai Tribal Agency, where many Taliban commanders are thought to be hiding. However, Pakistan Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani quickly backed away from this announcement, describing the operations as "ongoing" (BBC, December 12).

The success achieved by Pakistani forces in South Waziristan is vitally important to the country's lingering war against terrorism. The Waziristan counterterrorism model could be applied to other areas where the Taliban have strongholds and wreak havoc on the lives of innocent people. However, the latest wave of terror attacks clearly demonstrate that merely disrupting the Taliban bases does not mean that the strategy has worked. In fact, it seems the Taliban have successfully expanded their war beyond the mountains of South Waziristan. They are claiming responsibility for many

of the latest attacks, most notably the attack targeting senior officers in the Pakistan Army while they were praying in a highly secure mosque in the garrison city of Rawalpindi. This attack revealed that the fight against Taliban militants is far from won, and the Taliban suicide squad is still intact (*Dawn* [Karachi], December 5).

“The Path to Salvation”

While highlighting the importance of this offensive, Pakistani officials said that the military operation in Waziristan is a war for the country’s existence and will continue to a logical end: the complete elimination of militants (*The News* [Islamabad], October 21). Code-named Rah-e-Nejat (Path to Salvation), the operation was launched on October 17 after months of preparation that involved amassing nearly 30,000 troops near the South Waziristan agency and shelling of the Mahsud tribes in order to weaken the Taliban position. In the full-fledged offensive, Pakistani forces not only started using heavy weaponry, but also fighter jets and helicopter gunships. Initial reports suggested that the government’s 30,000 soldiers were taking part in the operation against what officials described as 10,000 hardcore militants. This number included between 1,000 to 1,500 foreign fighters, mostly Uzbeks (*Dawn*, October 18). Military officials have said that more than 600 militants and 70 security personnel have been killed in the six-week long military operation (*The News*, November 30).

Many analysts quickly described this much-awaited operation as the “mother of all battles,” saying tough resistance from the militant side would provide the army with its greatest challenge yet (*Daily Times* [Islamabad] October 8). Many also referred to the setbacks faced by Pakistani forces in this region since the start of the current insurgency in 2003-2004. Besides dozens of minor clashes and skirmishes, the three major previous operations in the South Waziristan tribal agency in 2004, 2005 and 2008 all ended in embarrassment for the Pakistani forces, leading the government to resort to controversial “peace deals.” Unfortunately, all these so-called peace deals not only provided the militants with a respite, but also helped them in strengthening and re-organizing themselves (*Dawn*, October 18).

Several events paved the way for the Pakistani Army’s operation in South Waziristan. First was the successful military offensive earlier this year in the Swat Valley against militants led by a local radical cleric, Maulana Fazlullah, which served as a morale booster for the

military and inspired confidence in the people. The Swat Valley was taken over by Fazlullah’s forces and they implemented a strict version of Shari’a based on the Afghan Taliban government of the mid-90s. Second, the killing of Baitullah Mahsud in an August 5 American drone attack led officials to believe the time would be ripe for a military offensive while the TTP were mourning the death of their leader. A final catalyst was the spectacular attack on the Army’s headquarters in Rawalpindi in October that left 20 people dead. The Pakistani Taliban took responsibility for the attack on the GHQ, Pakistan’s Pentagon, in which ten gunmen disguised as soldiers infiltrated the heavily guarded building (*Daily Times* [Lahore], October 13). The attack left the civilian and military leadership with no choice but to go after the TTP and target their main hub in South Waziristan (*The News* [Islamabad] October 20). As was the case in the Swat military operation, there was again strong public support for the offensive in South Waziristan. For the first time, the Swat military operation was seen by the local people as Pakistan’s own offensive, not something done at the behest of the United States. A day before the launching of the Waziristan operation, the military leadership received significant political support from all of the mainstream political parties - ruling as well as opposition – except the pro-Taliban religious parties.

The Waziristan offensive was a much more difficult campaign with many more casualties than the Swat operation earlier this year. Surprisingly, Pakistani forces easily captured some important places like Makeen, Sararogha, Laddah, Kunigaram and Kotkai in four weeks without any tough resistance. These areas once made up the stronghold of the slain TTP commander, Baitullah Mahsud.

TTP Leadership Has Survived

Few military operations have received as much advance “publicity” as the South Waziristan offensive. Military strategists usually want to capture the enemy off guard. In South Waziristan’s case, the first formal, well-publicized statement came in June from the governor of the North-West Frontier Province, Owais Ghani, when he announced the government had finally decided to go all out against the Pakistani Taliban and its leader. There were warnings from many different quarters that a delay in the operation could provide the opportunity for militants, particularly the TTP leadership, to leave for Afghanistan or slip into other areas of Pakistan. In fact, there were strong voices in favor of a quick military

operation while the Taliban were on the run after the military's success in Swat.

Now that the first phase of the military operation in Waziristan is almost complete, with the major towns captured and officials claiming to dismantle militant's bases, it is clear that top TTP leaders have survived and successfully managed to escape to other secure regions. This includes the movement's current leader, Hakimullah Mahsud, and his top lieutenant, Wali-ur-Rahman. It is not obvious where they have gone, but it is quite clear that they have unleashed a fresh wave of terror by sending their suicide squads across the country.

The official story is that the three-month operation was meant to blockade the Mahsud tribal territory to stop the flow of TTP supplies and to provide an opportunity for the local civilian population to leave the region. Since the Army was still maintaining order in parts of the Swat Valley with a troop presence of 20,000 soldiers, the government did not want to open another front immediately and delayed the Waziristan operation (*Daily Times*, July 21). The Waziristan operation may not ensure peace in the region because the TTP leadership is still at large. It is likely that militants retreated to their hideouts in secure regions where they can easily regroup and launch a guerilla war with terrorist attacks across the country (*Daily Times*, November 8).

Conclusion

The mountainous border region of South Waziristan is of critical importance not only to Pakistan's struggle against militancy, but also for the U.S.-led war on terror in the region, soon to be reinforced by 30,000 more U.S. troops in Afghanistan. It was South Waziristan where the current insurgency began in 2003-2004, and it was this same region which gave birth to the Pakistani Taliban phenomenon that later expanded to other parts of the tribal region, finally culminating in the formation of the TTP in December 2007 under the leadership of Baitullah Mahsud. The region has been under the control of militants who have used this space not only for terrorist acts inside Pakistan but also for staging attacks across the border in Afghanistan. Terrorists were openly trained here and suicide bombers, mostly teenage boys, were trained and indoctrinated in these mountains. At times, South Waziristan also served as a nerve center for the militants' poisonous propaganda against the Pakistani state and the United States and its allies (*The News*, Islamabad, October 23).

All this makes the physical occupation of South Waziristan by the Pakistani forces a major success, particularly after years of setbacks and embarrassments which included losing military posts, the surrender of troops to the TTP and failed peace deals with the militants. The jihadis have lost control of Waziristan, but they have successfully taken the war into the more secure urban areas of Pakistan, where they have been able to carry out terrorist strikes on the civilian population. The South Waziristan operation could be just the beginning of a long and difficult war.

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Terror Without Frontiers: Transnational Terror Plots Expose Lashkar-e-Taiba's Global Reach

By Animesh Roul

The two day visit of American Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) officials on December 8 to brainstorm with their Indian counterparts in the newly established National Investigation Agency (NIA) and other Indian security agencies provided a much needed thrust to the slow-paced Mumbai terror investigations. The investigating agencies of both countries reportedly shared intelligence to establish the missing link between last year's terror events in Mumbai and the recently foiled Lashkar-e-Taiba Chicago plot. The NIA was formed in response to last year's Mumbai attack to deal with terrorism-related threats.

The Chicago Conspiracy

Two suspected Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) operatives, Pakistan-born U.S. citizen David Coleman Headley (a.k.a. Daood Gilani) and Pakistani-Canadian Tahawwur Rana were arrested in Chicago for allegedly plotting to launch attacks on major landmarks in India and Denmark, using U.S. territory as their base. Headley was arrested on October 3 by the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport,

while Rana was arrested on October 18 in Chicago (*Chicago Tribune*, October 27).

The latest LeT plot targeted vital landmarks, installations and elite boarding schools in India, including the National Defense College in New Delhi, the Doon School in Dehradun and the Woodstock School in Mussoorie. It has also been reported that the suspects planned to target American and Israeli nationals in India and were involved in plotting last year's Mumbai terror attacks at the behest of Lashkar-e-Taiba's Pakistan-based leadership.

According to the FBI investigation into the Chicago case, Headley visited Pakistan a number of times in the past and was constantly in touch with his LeT handlers through email. He also attended several LeT training camps in the past decade. Headley was reportedly planning to travel to Pakistan in the near future to meet Ilyas Kashmiri, the chief of the Harkat-ul Jihad al-Islami (HUJI), based in Pakistan Administered Kashmir (PAK). Headley reportedly used the code-name "Pir Sahib" when referring to Ilyas Kashmiri. In the Kashmir jihadi world, however, Syed Salauddin, leader of the Kashmiri Hizbul Mujahideen organization and the United Jihad Council, is known as "Pir Sahib." It seems Salauddin is one of Headley's handlers, but Headley might be trying to waylay a connection to him by keeping the investigation focused on Ilyas Kashmiri alone to save his real mentor. Kashmiri narrowly escaped death in a September missile attack and is closely associated with Syed Salauddin.

The email communications revealed that a LeT mastermind in Pakistan placed a higher priority on using Headley to assist in planning a new attack in India than on completing the planned attack in Denmark, designed to target the facilities of the *Jyllands-Posten*, the Danish newspaper which carried cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in 2005. The Denmark plot was codenamed "Mickey Mouse" by the suspects (Reuters, December 2).

Headley has been charged with 12 counts of conspiracy to "bomb public places in India, murder and maim persons in India and Denmark, provide material support to foreign terrorist plots, provide material support to Lashkar and aiding and abetting the murder of U.S. citizens in India" (*Hindustan Times*, December 7). Headley was also charged for providing material support to LeT and for conducting extensive surveillance of targets in Mumbai preceding the November 2008

terrorist attacks (Press Release, US Department of Justice, December 7; *Wall Street Journal*, December 7). Headley traveled to Mumbai five times in less than three years, the last trip being in July 2008. He carried out video surveillance of locations including the Jewish Chabad House, two luxury hotels, the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus and many other public places. The FBI charges suggest Headley met with other Pakistan-based co-conspirators and discussed sea-routes and potential landing sites.

Military Connections?

The ongoing FBI probe has included a retired Pakistani army officer, identified as Major Abdur Rehman Hashim Syed (a.k.a. Pasha). Abdur Rehman was one of two Pakistan-based terrorist leaders mentioned by Headley who helped him in his frequent trips to Pakistan by providing local logistics. In February, the FBI sought access to another accused in the Mumbai terror events presently under Mumbai police custody, Fahim Arshad Ansari, in connection with ongoing investigations related to the Mumbai terror events. (*Indian Express*, February 1). Fahim's lawyers attempted to prevent FBI questioning on the grounds that there was no legal provision that would allow a foreign agency the opportunity to interrogate prisoners within India. Their efforts failed and the FBI was given access, though Fahim later alleged sexual harassment by a female FBI officer that caused him "severe itching and wounds on his body, including his private parts" (*Hindustan Times*, February 9; *Indian Express*, February 10). Other than Headley, Fahim is also accused of carrying out pre-attack reconnaissance for the LeT.

Information on Abdur Rehman surfaced during the investigations and he was charged in a Chicago court on December 7 on two counts of conspiring to commit terrorist acts. The other LeT accomplice is yet to be identified (*Times of India*, December 8, *Indian Express*, December 8; *The News* [Islamabad], December 9). The other unidentified Lashkar mastermind could be the Lahore-based Sajid Mir, another former major in the Pakistani army.

It is also suspected that Rehman facilitated Headley's communications with Ilyas Kashmiri and other Pakistani terror leaders. According to Headley's email records, Abdur Rehman was arrested by Pakistani authorities in the summer of 2009 and later released. Pakistan army spokesman Athar Abbas recently indicated that no serving officer has been detained in the case and denied

reports of the involvement of five other army officers, including two serving Colonels and a retired Brigadier questioned in late November 2009 (*Daily Times* [Lahore], November 25). However, Abbas has admitted the news of a retired army Major's arrest for his alleged links with two Chicago terror suspects.

From Denmark to Mumbai

Meanwhile, India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) and the Mumbai Police are now planning to file a supplementary charge sheet against David Headley and Tahawwur Rana for involvement in the 26/11 attacks (*Economic Times* [New Delhi], December 9). The NIA has sought details of Headley's links with people in India, including his association with Indian nationals Rahul Bhat and Vilas Varak, as well as some diplomats and business personalities who allegedly helped Headley in India (*Mumbai Mirror*, December 9).

Headley made his first appearance in a Chicago court on December 9, where he denied his connection with last year's Mumbai attacks and the plot against *Jyllands-Posten*. Now India is awaiting the next hearing scheduled on January 12, 2010. The FBI is planning to send a team to Pakistan before then as part of the ongoing investigation into links with the Chicago terror plot. Pakistan, however, has kept silent over the whole LeT-Chicago conspiracy until now.

LeT spokesperson Abdullah Muntazir (a.k.a. Gazhnavi) has denied the organization's presence in the United States and refuted any links with Headley and Rana. The same Gazhnavi who had denied any LeT role in the 2008 Mumbai attacks indicated in his latest conversations with media that "LeT cadres are only fighting Indian security forces in 'Indian-held Kashmir,' not elsewhere" (*Dawn*, November 23; *Daily Times*, December 1). In fact, LeT has plotted against India from its overseas cells in the past. In June 2003, the FBI arrested at least seven Lashkar sympathizers or would-be terrorists from in and around the Washington D.C. region for providing material support to LeT (*Indian Express*, June 28, 2003).

LeT Targets the U.S. and Indian Missions in Bangladesh

Muntazir's denial of Lashkar-e-Taiba's external agenda notwithstanding, LeT has also plotted another round of attacks in Bangladesh, targeting the U.S. Embassy and the Indian High Commission in Dhaka. Investigating agencies in Bangladesh said that a Pakistan-based LeT

commander identified as Abdur Rahman Saeed had transferred Bangladesh Taka (BDT) 6 million (\$86,000) to one Faizullah for the attack on the U.S. Embassy and Indian High Commission. A string of arrests were made in Bangladesh following information provided by arrested LeT militants from Chittagong in early November. Bangladesh police detained Mufti Harun Izahar, Shahidul Islam and al-Amin (a.k.a. Saiful) on November 4 for their suspected link with a plot to attack the U.S. embassy and Indian high commission in Dhaka (*Daily Star* [Dhaka], November 23). A fortnight after the first round of arrests in Bangladesh, police arrested a LeT operative and alleged terrorist mastermind identified as Mohammad Motalem (a.k.a. Majnu) from Dhaka's Motijheel precinct. According to Monirul Islam, the Deputy Commissioner of Police of the Dhaka Detective Branch, Majnu has confessed to recruiting LeT operatives in Bangladesh and arranging their passage to Pakistan, India and Afghanistan (*Daily Star*, November 23).

Conclusion

After lying low for a while subsequent to the Mumbai episode, the LeT's undiminished desire to launch transnational operations has reemerged. The two recently foiled Chicago and Bangladesh plots have exposed Lashkar-e-Taiba's transnational character and reach not only in South Asia or the Middle East, but also in Western nations such as the United States. Undoubtedly, any audacious mass casualty attack on India, Denmark or the U.S. embassy in Dhaka would guarantee Lashkar-e-Taiba a position parallel to al-Qaeda in the international terrorism arena. These failed plots prove that the LeT aspires to a global reach and may have the capability to launch large-scale attacks on foreign soil beyond South Asia.

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