



# Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

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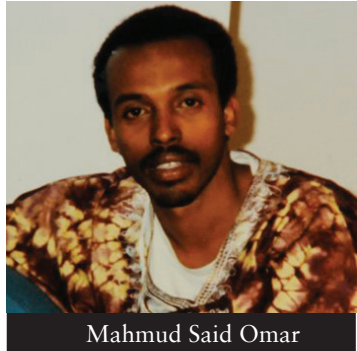
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## AL-QAEDA VIDEOTAPES EXECUTION OF SENIOR YEMENI INTELLIGENCE OFFICER AS PROACTIVE MEASURE AGAINST DRONE STRIKES

An al-Qaeda videotape showing the execution of a Yemeni military intelligence chief began circulating throughout Yemen by Bluetooth technology on November 26. The video was produced by al-Malahim Establishment for Media Production, the media wing of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Entitled "The Demise of Traitors 1," the videotape addressed al-Qaeda's view of Muslims who "collaborate" with the West before proceeding to give a practical lesson in the fate of such "collaborators" in the form of Lieutenant Colonel Bassam Sulayman Tarbush al-Sharqabi, the intelligence chief for Marib Province, who was captured by al-Qaeda last June.

Though not mentioned explicitly, a large part of the tape appears devoted to warning off Yemenis from providing intelligence to U.S. forces that would allow them to target al-Qaeda leaders in Yemen with missile strikes from Predator drones. Given the tactical success of drone strikes in northwest Pakistan, al-Qaeda leaders in Yemen and Saudi Arabia may naturally be concerned about being targeted in a similar manner. Colonel Tarbush was widely believed in Yemen to have provided the intelligence that allowed a U.S. Predator to kill local al-Qaeda leader Ali Qaed Sunian al-Harithi (a.k.a. Abu Ali) in 2002.



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The videotape warns of “mercenaries” who collaborated with the Jews and Christians for money. “The lowest and vilest of these collaborators are the spies, who continue to help the enemies of the nation of Islam: the rulers, collaborators and allies of America.” The tape then shows footage of an infrared strobe light of the type used to mark targets for night attacks. Viewers are warned of spies who plant such instruments on targets designated for air strikes.

Colonel Tarbush, who appears blindfolded at all times in the video, is described as an individual who spied on Muslims and the mujahideen. “He oversees a network of spies, and recruits clan members to spy on Muslims.” Tarbush was an expert in the intricacies of clan politics in Marib region, where he spent the last ten of his 14 years in the security services. His experience also allowed him to build a local intelligence network, though he admits in the video that he has revealed the names of all his agents to al-Qaeda interrogators.

Clearly under pressure from his questioners, Colonel Tarbush agrees that the government of President Ali Abdullah Saleh is a collaborationist government that sets up “security forces with the authority and capabilities to suppress the mujahideen, according to American requests.” He also acknowledges that Yemen’s legal code “violates Shari’a.” Asked if he has any advice for young Yemenis, Colonel Tarbush advises them to avoid being “pulled in by American intelligence and [Israel’s] Mossad.”

After being led before a firing squad of masked men, the image cuts out and only gunfire is heard, followed by footage of the apparently dead body of Colonel Tarbush. China’s Xinhua news agency later said senior Yemeni security officials had confirmed the Colonel’s death (Xinhua, November 26).

The apparent execution of Colonel Tarbush follows an earlier AQAP warning to the “infidel” rulers of Yemen, who “opened bureaus to spy on the mujahideen and even on the Muslims in general” (Audio statement of Shaykh Abu al-Zubayr Adil al-Abbab, Al-Malahim Establishment for Media Production, October 22). A posting on a jihadist website said the execution videotape gave “special solace to all those family members of those mujahideen who were tortured, handicapped and in many cases killed under the supervision of these [security] officials” (ansarnet.info, November 27).

## BALUCH NATIONALIST LEADER DISCUSSES CREATION OF A SECULAR AND INDEPENDENT BALUCHISTAN

Baluch leader Hyrbyair Marri recently gave an interview on the independence movement and growing insurgency in the highly strategic and resource rich Pakistani province of Balochistan (Geo News [Karachi], November 26). Hyrbyair seeks a negotiated withdrawal of the Pakistani military from Balochistan, maintaining that Balochistan was an independent country in 1947 until Pakistani forces occupied the region in 1948. Provincial autonomy is rejected as “we do not accept that Balochistan is a province of Pakistan.”

Hyrbyair is the son of Marri tribal chief Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri. His brother, Balach Marri, a reported leader of the Marxist-oriented and Marri-dominated Baluch Liberation Army (BLA), was killed by Pakistani security forces in 2007 (Balochistan Express, November 22, 2007; see also *Terrorism Monitor*, April 3, 2008). Hyrbyair is a former Balochistan MP (1997-2002) and was a minister in the provincial assembly for two of those years. He fled to the UK in 2002, but was arrested and charged with inciting terrorism in December 2007 (*Dawn* [Karachi], December 12). Supporters of Hyrbyair claim the arrest came at the request of former Pakistan president General Pervez Musharaff, who demanded action on Balochi nationalists living in exile in the UK as the price of further cooperation in the war on terrorism. An Islamabad daily reported that the new government contributed substantial amounts to Hyrbyair’s defense as part of a program of confidence-building measures with Baluch leaders. Hyrbyair was acquitted on three charges with no decision on a fourth in February 2009 (Crown Prosecution Service Press Statement, March 10).

Compared to the rest of Pakistan, Balochistan is sparsely populated and poorly developed, but Hyrbyair insists that an abundance of natural resources such as oil and gas will provide the economic backbone for an independent state. Hyrbyair suggests a secular Baluch state may also attract the support of the United States. “Secularism is in the nature of the Baluch people and is a part of the Baluch ethos.”

Hyrbyair rejected the past participation of Baluch politicians in Pakistan’s federal government, describing two former Baluch presidents and one prime minister as “paid employees of the federal government.” Baluch politicians who took government posts may have

“wanted to do something for the people of Balochistan, but contrary to that, their participation in the political process consolidated the tyranny of the federal government over Balochistan.”

In response to questions regarding the violence of the independence movement and the targeting of Punjabi civilians, Hyrbyair denies having any influence over the movement, which he claims is run by “local Baloch youth,” though he also claims to have no idea who the movement’s leader is. Asked if the independence movement was financed by India, Hyrbyair replied, “I don’t think that it is true.”

The development of the massive new Gwadar port in Balochistan is a major point of contention, with Hyrbyair claiming the port will benefit only Pakistan and not Balochistan. The nationalist leader says local leaders who opposed the development were kidnapped and killed by Pakistani intelligence agencies. Hyrbyair denies that the opposition to the port is being funded by Gulf states that will lose business to the modern facilities being built at Gwadar.

The Urdu language interview came only a day after Hyrbyair and other exiled Baloch leaders rejected a proposal from Islamabad designed to end the long-standing insurgency in Balochistan. The offer called for a cessation in military activities, the release of political detainees and a payment of \$1.4 billion in gas royalties over 12 years (Reuters, November 25). The “Rahe-i-Haqooq Balochistan” package included a ban on the construction of new military camps in Balochistan, though two existing camps would remain operational (*The News* [Islamabad], November 24). Hyrbyair described the government’s proposal as “a mockery and a cruel joke” (*The News* [Islamabad], November 25).

## American Jihad: New Details Emerge About al-Shabaab Recruitment in North America

By Raffaello Pantucci

**O**n November 23, federal prosecutors in the United States unsealed indictments against members of a group of Minneapolis natives accused of being at the heart of a cell sending men and boys to fight with al-Shabaab, a radical Islamist

movement in Somalia with close ties to al-Qaeda. [1] The unsealing of the documents came in the wake of the arrest of one of the members of the group, Mahamud Said Omar in the Netherlands, and the possible discovery of a similar cell operating out of Toronto (AP, November 10; *National Post* [Toronto], November 21).

The release of the information, which for the most part does not pertain to new cases, does shed further light on the recruitment structures in place and the radicalization method by which a foreign terrorist organization like al-Shabaab is able to entice young Westernized men to join their ranks. In many ways, the revelations show the degree to which the sort of radicalization that was previously thought to be more prevalent in Europe is in fact a problem shared by the United States. On the basis of the growing numbers of American jihadis, it would appear as though foreign terrorist rhetoric has found an increasing resonance in America.

The released documents which show in detail the path taken by 26-year-old Shirwa Ahmed, a young Somali-American who laid claim to the dubious honor of being America’s first suicide bomber, having been identified by a finger that was found at the site of one of a pair of suicide car-bombings that targeted offices of the Puntland Intelligence Service in Bossaso on October 29, 2008. [2] Ahmed was part of a group of men who left Minneapolis in early December 2007, but while the others headed for Northern Somalia, Ahmed instead went on Hajj to Saudi Arabia, landing in Jeddah on December 4, 2007 (*Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune*, November 25, 2008).

Having completed his pilgrimage, Ahmed joined the others who had first passed through a series of al-Shabaab safe houses before starting a training course alongside dozens of “young ethnic Somalis from Somalia, elsewhere in Africa, Europe and the United States.” At these camps, the men were taught to use a variety of weapons while being indoctrinated in “anti-Ethiopian, anti-American, anti-Israeli, and anti-Western beliefs.” [3] The training regimen was apparently tough, with only Ahmed and one other recruit completing the course. These two went on to take part in an assault on Ethiopian troops before the second man left the conflict and lost track of Ahmed.

The documents also show the importance of a local support network of older individuals who help in the radicalization process and aid in supplying the young men with equipment and money to go to Somalia.

Three individuals in particular are identified in the new documents: Abdulahi Ahmed Farah, 32; Abdiweli Yassin Isse, 24 (who both remain at large and were last spotted crossing the San Ysidro border into Mexico on October 8 with tickets to Mexico City); and Mahamud Said Omar, 43, who was captured in the Netherlands on November 8. [5]

The three men were allegedly involved in hosting a series of meetings at a variety of locations in Minneapolis, where Farah would tell the others of his experiences fighting in Somalia, claiming “that he experienced true brotherhood while fighting in Somalia and that travel for jihad was the best thing that they could do.” He exhorted them “not to be afraid” and that “to fight jihad will be fun.” Farah emphasized that “they would get to shoot guns in Somalia.” [5] Farah claimed that he had sustained injuries (corroborated by others who knew him in Minneapolis) while fighting on the Somali/Kenyan border and had left soon afterwards for Nairobi where he married two women – undoubtedly intending to persuade the young men in Minneapolis of the possible benefits of jihad in this world as well as the next. He also allegedly helped coordinate a conference call between a group of potential recruits at a Minneapolis mosque and Isse in Somalia (*Pioneer Press* [St. Paul], November 24).

While both Isse and Omar are reported to have contributed to this radicalization (Isse allegedly referred to fighting in Somalia “a good jihad,” while Omar “provided encouragement”), the released documents point to a greater role as fundraisers. Isse was apparently involved in approaching other members of the Somali community to ask them to contribute money to help individuals study the Koran in Saudi Arabia. [6] It is unclear from the documents where Omar got the money he is alleged to have given the men, but he had enough to help nine of them to travel to Somalia. [7] He is also alleged to have traveled to join the men at a Shabaab safehouse in Somalia, where he supplied them with money to purchase AK-47s and calling cards. He also gave money to their Somali hosts (*Pioneer Press* [St. Paul], November 27). Finally, he is alleged to have hosted a meeting in Minnesota in November 2008, a few days before another group left for Somalia (Minnesota Public Radio, November 24, 2009).

In early November, six young ethnic-Somali men disappeared from Toronto’s Somali community. Their families are reported to have received a phone call from Kenya, where the men were believed to be preparing

to cross into Somalia to join al-Shabaab (*Toronto Star*, November 19; *National Post* [Toronto], November 18). The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) are searching for information on the missing men. Canadian Public Safety Minister Peter Van Loan warned that those who traveled overseas to participate in terrorist activities could face prosecution in Canada (*National Post*, November 20). Toronto is home to about 150,000 ethnic-Somalis, a number of whom have returned to Somalia to join militant Islamist groups since 2006.

None of the new revelations point to a direct threat from these networks to the United States, but the role of a former fighter in the recruitment of others highlights the risk of such individuals returning home. Details are yet to emerge concerning the Minneapolis group (and the apparent Canadian parallel group in Toronto), but their existence shows an appetite for jihad amongst young Muslim men in North America. Whether this presages an impending threat on a scale similar to that seen previously in Europe is unclear, but it certainly shows that the United States is not immune to militant Islamist radicalization.

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#### Notes:

1. Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, “Terror Charges unsealed in Minneapolis against eight men, justice department announces,” November 23, 2009, <http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2009/November/09-nsd-1267.html>
2. United States District Court, State and District of Minnesota – Criminal Complaint, United States of America v. 1) Cabdulaahi Ahmed Faarax; 2) Abdiweli Yassin Isse, October 8, 2009. The document uses the official Somali written form in rendering the names.
3. Ibid, p.8
4. Ibid, p.14
5. Ibid, pp.9-10, 14
6. Ibid, p.12
7. United States District Court, District of Minnesota – Indictment, Case 0:09-cr-00242-JMR-SRN, United States of America v. Mahamud Said Omar, August 20, 2009



## New Strategies in Pakistan's Counter-Insurgency Operation in South Waziristan

By Syed Adnan Ali Shah Bukhari

Pakistan's recent "Rah-e-Nijat" (Path to Salvation) military operation in the South Waziristan agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) has achieved tremendous success since it began on October 17. It is believed that security forces should be able to clear the main towns of Taliban presence by early December 2009, when it starts snowing in the region (*Daily Times* [Lahore], November 1). The military operation is patterned on the lines of a similar operation conducted in the Swat district of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) in April-May 2009, code named "Rah-e-Rast".

The current military operations have highlighted some new elements in Pakistan's counter-insurgency warfare which were not seen in previous operations that the Pakistani government conducted during 2003-2008.

1. Pakistan's counter-insurgency strategy is a comprehensive one that employs a pre and post operation plan aimed at "clear, control and build" in the area cleansed of the Taliban presence. Both the South Waziristan and Swat operations were divided into three phases: 1) seize control of communication infrastructure and clear the adjoining settlements and village, as well as destroy the command and control structure of the Taliban militants; 2) mop-up operations aimed at the remaining terrorist infrastructure in the far-flung areas; and 3) reconstruction of the area and rehabilitation of the internally displaced persons (IDPs).

2. The recent successes in Pakistan's military operation in Swat and South Waziristan testify to the fact that Pakistan has sufficient counter-insurgency capability to dislodge the Taliban from their strongholds in FATA and NWFP. This nullifies the previous assumptions regarding the Pakistani armed forces that they were tailored to fight conventional warfare against regular armies in plains and deserts and lacked the training and ability to conduct CI operations in mountainous terrain against non-state actors. [1]

3. What also seems new is the Pakistan Army's willingness to capture and hold all the main population centers in South Waziristan. This important new strategy was first used in Pakistan during the Swat offensive in April 2009. Whether the Pakistan Army will remain deployed in the population centers of South Waziristan remains to be seen. However, Pakistan's Interior Minister, Rahman Malik, recently hinted at sending additional troops to South Waziristan (*The Nation* [Islamabad], November 22).

4. Similarly, there is a greater reliance on airpower in both military operations which intends to destroy the defenses of the Taliban militants before the military goes in. What is also new is a much more extensive use of precision-guided munitions by the Pakistani Air Force.

5. The South Waziristan operation was the first major operation where the Pakistani military received intelligence support from the United States, which provided unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) coverage "on-demand." This seems to have increased Pakistani situational-awareness in a mountainous rugged terrain where the enemy has the historic advantage of applying ambush and hit-and-run attacks against the Pakistan Army. However, large problems remain in terms of using real time intelligence from the U.S. collection platforms with front-line Pakistani military units. Apart from intelligence sharing, the United States rushed weapons and ammunition worth millions of dollars to Pakistan on an emergency basis to ensure a sustained supply of material to the Pakistani troops battling the Taliban in South Waziristan.

6. The Pakistani Army seems to have done a much better job in conducting intelligence operations. While South Waziristan still remains a "black hole" for the government in terms of human intelligence infrastructure, the ISI seems to have achieved a certain level of penetration of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), including interception of messages carried over one of the TTP's main communication tools, "Push-to-Talk," a cell phone option that permits the phone to be used as a walkie-talkie (*Kuwait Times*, October 19; *China Daily*, October 22).

7. The public support which the Pakistan Army received from people in the conflict zone as well as from the entire country helped in carrying out the counter-insurgency operations successfully. The popularity of the Taliban – which remained quite high during 2003-2007 – dipped to an all time low. The successful conclusion of the first phase of the counter-insurgency would restore public confidence over the Pakistani armed forces and raise the morale of the security personnel.

However, the current operation in South Waziristan is just one episode of a drawn out battle between the government and the Taliban. Pakistan's Interior Ministry has already alluded to more operations in Orakzai and Khyber Agencies against the Taliban (*The News* [Islamabad], November 23). Operations in Kurram and North Waziristan Agencies may not be ruled out in the future.

While it seems that the objectives of the first and second phase of the current military operation could be achieved with less difficulty, it is the third phase – the rehabilitation of the IDPs and rebuilding and reconstructing the entire region – which is fraught with challenges. Pakistan is passing through its worst economic crunch and is unable to undertake massive development to change the economic contours of the region and woo the local population away from the Taliban. A case in point is the Swati IDPs, the majority of whom returned back to areas cleared of the Taliban presence, but where reconstruction work has not yet started.

The recent military successes by Pakistan against the Taliban in FATA and the NWFP provide a ray of hope to both Pakistan and Afghanistan that overcoming the Taliban on both sides of the border may not be impossible, provided the two nations have the will and determination to take on the Taliban. However, any degree of success against the Taliban will remain limited until the root causes of violence in FATA/NWFP, such as poverty, illiteracy and underdevelopment, are addressed.

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Notes:

1. Muhammad Khurshid Khan, "Analyzing Domestic Terrorism as a Threat to Pakistan's Security and the Policy Response," *IPRI Journal* 9(2), Summer 2009, pp. 49-76.

## PKK Leader Abdullah Ocalan Challenges Omission from Peace Initiative from His Prison Cell

By Emrullah Uslu

Turkey has been busy debating the recent initiative of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP) to end the long conflict between Turkish security forces and the Kurdistan Workers Party (*Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan* – PKK). On November 12, Turkish Interior Minister Besir Atalay, the coordinator of the Kurdish initiative, revealed the steps that the government is planning to take immediately. The government sees that democracy is the only solution to the problems in the region. With this perspective, the AKP government has formulated its initiative with six initial steps:

1. Establishment of an independent human-rights institution to monitor human rights violations.
2. Establishment of a commission to examine the policies and practices surrounding discrimination against minorities.
3. Parliamentary ratification of the U.N. Convention against Torture and the creation of a national preventative mechanism.
4. Establishment of an independent oversight agency tasked with receiving and investigating accusations of torture or mistreatment by the security forces.
5. Renaming of residential areas in line with demands from local communities.
6. Allowing political parties to communicate in languages other than Turkish during election campaigns (*Hurriyet*, November 13).

While listing these points, the government left the door open for further progress on the issue. At the final stage it may need to amend some articles in the constitution as well. As expected, the opposition parties have harshly criticized the Kurdish initiative. The Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi - MHP) associates the plan directly with the PKK's imprisoned leader, Abdullah Ocalan, and accuses the government of cooperating with terrorists (*Hurriyet*, November 17). The secularist Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi - CHP) accused the government of showing weakness against the terrorists. Naturally the political quarrel between the major opposition parties and the government has inflamed the debate and escalated the nationalist confrontation between the Turks and Kurds.

### The Island Prisoner

At the other end of the spectrum, the PKK constantly asks the government to ease the harsh prison conditions of its founder, Abdullah Ocalan. Since 1999, Ocalan has been held alone in a maximum security prison on Imrali Island in the Marmara Sea. He has the opportunity to meet with his lawyers on a weekly basis, however, because he is held on an island, many weeks often pass in winter when weather conditions do not permit his lawyers to visit the island. Due to his "undisciplined" actions inside the prison, officials punish him from time to time with "absolute isolation," during which time he is permitted no visitors.

The Turkish government has promised the European Court and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) to change the conditions of isolation. The CPT recommended that Turkish authorities "take immediate steps to find means of ensuring that Abdullah Ocalan's right to receive visits from his relatives and lawyers is fully effective in practice." In addition, the CPT has asked that Abdullah Ocalan "should at the earliest opportunity be integrated into a setting where contacts with other inmates and a wider range of activities are possible." [1]

To meet the requests of the CPT and the PKK, the Turkish government has built a new prison facility on Imrali Island and transferred five other inmates there (*Zaman*, November 18). The timing of the inmate transfers to Imrali Island was thought to be a gesture by the government to show its sincerity in the Kurdish initiative, yet Ocalan did not like his new accommodations. Through his relatives and lawyers, Ocalan shared his view that the new facility was "worse

than the previous conditions" (*Radikal*, November 19). The Turkish press reported that the new prison was built according to international standards, which allow Ocalan a seven meter square cell, a toilet and shower. His previous cell was around 13 square meters. Unlike the old prison, the new facility has units allowing Ocalan to meet with his family members and lawyers (*Radikal*, November 19). The structure of the new prison meets with the CPT criteria; however Ocalan claims that the new prison conditions create many health problems, including shortage of breath (Ajansa Nuceyan a Firate, November 27).

### Ethnic Tensions Erupt

While the opposition parties are agitating the Turkish public against the Kurdish initiative, the Kurdish nationalist Democratic Society Party (Demokratik Toplum Partisi - DTP) has organized several political rallies to protest Ocalan's new prison conditions, further escalating the division between the Turkish and Kurdish people. In Diyarbakir, five thousand people answered the DTP's call to protest Ocalan's prison conditions (*Radikal*, November 26). Because of the intensified debate on Turkish and Kurdish nationalism, the two peoples are at the edge of a bloody confrontation. On November 22, the DTP organized a party convoy to tour the city of Izmir where Turkish nationalists and Kurdish immigrants live together. The DTP convoy was stopped by a few young Turkish nationalists, sparking a sudden confrontation between DTP supporters and the people of Izmir. The DTP convoy was stoned and three people were injured (*Radikal*, November 22). On November 26, in the town of Baramic in Canakkale province (another coastal city located in the western part of the country where Kurds and Turks live together), a quarrel between Kurdish and Turkish youths immediately incited a large-scale reaction against Kurdish minorities in the town. Police arrested four Kurdish teenagers. As the news of the clashes spread, thousands of people gathered in front of the police station, demanding the release of the Kurdish teenagers so that they could lynch them (*Sabah*, November 26).

The public unrest sparked protests and demonstrations organized by pro-Kurdish DTP supporters in the ethnic-Kurdish regions of the eastern part of the country. The ethnic confrontations ended in two days; however, tension still exists in the country (ntvmsnbc.com, December 1). Hundreds of Kurdish people took to the streets in the shantytowns of Istanbul, tossing Molotov cocktails at buses and cars to support Ocalan. In Mersin,

pro-PKK shop owners closed their shops to support county-wide demonstrations against Ocalan's new prison conditions (Ajansa Nuceyan a Firate, November 30).

The most worrying incident was the confrontation in Diyarbakir between pro-PKK supporters and supporters of the Kurdish Hizbullah group, which opposes the PKK's socialist orientation. On November 29, a group of PKK supporters gathered there and tossed Molotov cocktails at the offices of Sura-Der, a pro-Hizbullah association. In response, a thousand Hizbullah supporters got together and protested against the PKK (NTV, December 1). Considering the bloody history of clashes between the Hizbullah and the PKK in the 1990s, the possibility of a new confrontation between the two organizations alarms security institutions.

Between 1993 and 1995, roughly 700 people lost their lives during armed clashes between the two organizations. The main reason behind the bloodshed was the PKK's desire to be the only Kurdish nationalist organization in the region. In 1993, the PKK offered Hizbullah an opportunity to join the PKK to fight against the Turkish state, which both organizations view as the enemy. Hizbullah rejected the offer as it regards the PKK as an organization of infidels whose political program is inconsistent with Hizbullah's desire to establish an Islamic Kurdistan. Hizbullah leaders argue that, because the PKK is a secular organization, it is something similar to the secular Turkish state.

#### Seeking International Support for Ocalan

In addition to the street protests, PKK leaders have released statement after statement warning the government about Ocalan's prison conditions. The Kurdistan Democratic Confederation (Koma Civaken Kurdistan - KCK) issued a statement saying the "attacks" against Ocalan show that the intention of the Turkish government is to eliminate the PKK leader. "This is a war project against Ocalan and our organization and the Kurdish people. If Ocalan is not released from the 'death cell' where he was put, our organization is not responsible for further developments." (Ajansa Nuceyan a Firate, November 30).

Ocalan supporters have now taken their campaign to international human rights institutions. On that front, a petition campaign has been launched asking Amnesty

International and the CPT to take action against the Turkish government. The petition states:

"That Abdullah Ocalan's death sentence was abolished was good news for everyone, but that the sentence was replaced by torture and painful isolation, which may be called a 'white execution,' is an inhumane fact which your organizations should not accept and therefore do everything in your power to both deter and prevent (gopetition.com, November 29).

#### Conclusion

Although pro-PKK supporters claim they are protesting Ocalan's new prison conditions, in reality the protests are related to the government's Kurdish initiative. The PKK and the DTP are asking the government to recognize Ocalan as a peacemaker. The expectation was that the government could negotiate with Ocalan in return for better prison conditions outside Imrali Island and after a few years possibly offer him an amnesty. In fact, Ocalan still maintains his key position for any peace project; however, perhaps because of the fierce opposition from the Turkish nationalist parties, the AKP government does not want to include Ocalan in any part of the Kurdish initiative other than meeting the requirements of the CPT regarding the confinement of the PKK leader. More importantly, the political situation in the country is forcing the AKP government to move forward to the end. Any setback in the current initiative could bring political devastation for the AKP government. Perhaps calculating the political situation, Ocalan, through mass protests in every corner of the country, wants to show the AKP government and the security institutions that he is still the key person to deal with in bringing peace to the country.

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#### Notes:

1. Report to the Turkish Government on the visit to Turkey carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), May 19 – 22, 2007, <http://www.cpt.coe.int/documents/tur/2008-13-inf-eng.htm>.



## Separatists, Islamists and Islamabad Struggle for Control of Pakistani Balochistan

By Chris Zambelis

To say that the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Afghanistan in October 2001 shook Pakistan to its core would be an understatement. Since then, the war in Afghanistan has spilled over into Pakistan on multiple levels. The escalating cycle of violence between Pakistani security forces and a patchwork of tribal militants, particularly the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and foreign fighters aligned with the Taliban and al-Qaeda in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) is a case in point. Many observers of Pakistani affairs have used the deteriorating situation in the tribal agencies along the Afghanistan-Pakistan frontier as a bellwether of future trends in Pakistan. In this context, it is no surprise that events in Pakistan's tribal areas seem to draw the most attention. Yet Pakistan's Balochistan province is also beginning to draw interest as a center of Taliban and al-Qaeda activity.

Reports that the U.S. is seeking Pakistan's approval for expanding its controversial drone campaign against targets in Balochistan - a clear red line for Pakistan - have raised serious concerns in Islamabad about Washington's ultimate intentions (*The News*, [Islamabad], September 29). As the Obama administration escalates its military campaign in Afghanistan, Pakistani leaders have expressed deep concerns about the potential destabilization of Balochistan resulting from the intensified fighting expected in Afghanistan in the coming months (*The Nation* [Lahore], November 27). As if these concerns were not enough, Balochistan remains a hotbed of ethno-nationalist militancy, drug smuggling, and organized crime. Balochistan is also in the throes of a refugee crisis that has been largely ignored. The confluence of these trends - which indirectly or directly reinforce each other - is making an already dangerous situation worse with severe implications for Pakistan and the wider region.

### Geography and Demographics

Balochistan occupies approximately 42 percent of Pakistan's total landmass, making it the country's largest province. Yet in spite of its large geographic area,

Balochistan is only home to an estimated population ranging between 7 and 12 million, a consequence of its harsh, mountainous terrain and paucity of water sources, making it Pakistan's least densely populated region and smallest province in terms of total population. The provincial capital of Quetta is home to an estimated 750,000 to 1 million people. Ethnic Baloch represent a slight majority in the province, with ethnic Pashtuns, many of whom are refugees or descendants of refugees from Afghanistan, representing the next largest community, especially in the north. Ethnic Pashtun influence is significant in Balochistan; the provincial capital Quetta, for instance, is a majority Pashtun city, as are other areas of the province. Balochistan is also home to smaller ethnic and religious minorities.

Pakistani Balochistan is situated in a strategic location in southwestern Pakistan due south of the South Waziristan region of the FATA and adjacent to the borders of the neighboring Iranian province of Sistan-Balochistan and Afghanistan's Nimruz, Helmand, Kandahar, Zabol, and Paktika provinces. Balochistan lies on the Gulf of Oman, a busy sea passage that connects to the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf, and by extension, the wider Indian Ocean. Balochistan is also home to the strategically important Gwadar deepwater seaport. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was motivated largely by Moscow's pursuit of access to a long coveted warm water seaport giving access to the Indian Ocean.

Balochistan is among Pakistan's poorest and least developed regions. Paradoxically, it is also rich in natural resources. Balochistan is home to significant natural gas deposits (accounting for at least one-third of total Pakistani consumption) and oil reserves. It is also rich in minerals and metals, including copper, uranium, and gold (*Asia Times* [Hong Kong], May 9). Balochistan lies along the route of the proposed Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline - popularly dubbed the "peace pipeline" - designed to transfer natural gas from Iran to India via Pakistan. Balochistan also lies along the alternative regional pipeline network favored by the United States (precisely because it excludes Iran) known as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline. [1]

### Ethno-Nationalist Militancy

Balochistan has been a center of ethno-nationalist militancy and violent revolts against the state since the province was forcibly annexed by Pakistan after the partition of India gave rise to an independent Pakistan.

Prior to being annexed by Pakistan, Balochistan enjoyed autonomy under British colonial rule. Pakistan's ethnic Baloch community is underserved and deeply resents what it sees as a calculated effort by Islamabad to suppress Baloch identity and culture. Baloch nationalists argue that Islamabad is actively working to keep the Baloch people impoverished, weak, and disorganized, thus making it easier for the ethnic-Punjabi dominated central government to reap the benefits of Balochistan's vast natural resources. The latest outbreak of the Baloch insurgency was sparked by the deaths of three prominent Baloch rebel leaders following a period of relative calm. Baloch militant groups such as the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and the Balochistan Liberation United Front (BLUF) accused Islamabad of instigating the latest round of violence.

Baloch militants typically target symbols of the Pakistani state, political leaders, members of the security services and targets associated with the region's natural resources, such as gas pipelines. Pakistan has always viewed the Baloch with great suspicion, owing in part to their strong sense of national identity and their numbers in Afghanistan and the neighboring Iranian province of Sistan-Balochistan, where ethnic Baloch insurgents led by the obscure Jundallah (Soldiers of God) movement are mounting their own violent campaign against Tehran (see *Terrorism Monitor*, February 9). While Pakistan and Iran have a history of cooperating closely to suppress Baloch nationalism, as the Baloch separatist aspirations threaten the territorial integrity of both countries, Pakistan is wary of attempts by regional rivals such as India to support Baloch militancy (*PakTribune* [Rawalpindi], November 19).

The threat of Baloch separatism will remain a challenge for Pakistan in its own right. The deteriorating security situation across Pakistan and Afghanistan, however, could severely complicate matters for Islamabad in Balochistan. Baloch rebels, for instance, may see a window of opportunity to escalate their campaign against Islamabad as Pakistan concentrates its efforts on fighting militants in the tribal areas. A potential expansion of the U.S. drone campaign to Balochistan may also provide Baloch militants with another opening to strike at Islamabad. There is evidence to suggest that Baloch rebels are already exploiting the current turmoil in Pakistan and Afghanistan. A series of bomb blasts and abductions in recent years targeting Chinese laborers prompted China to halt construction of the Gwadar oil refinery in Balochistan due to security concerns (*Financial Times*, August 14). Baloch rebels have also

begun abducting international NGO personnel in the province. A senior UNHCR official was kidnapped and his driver killed by members of the BLUF in Quetta in February. BLUF staged the operation in part to highlight the plight of Baloch political prisoners in Pakistani prisons. While the UN official was eventually released, the BLUF's decision to target UN relief workers represents a major escalation of Baloch militancy (*Dawn* [Karachi], February 4). Islamabad fears that Baloch rebels may position themselves as a potential bulwark against the spread of Taliban and al-Qaeda-style extremism that is increasingly gripping the province's ethnic Pashtuns in an effort to gain allies in Washington, thus circumventing Islamabad's authority and potentially ushering in a new and more dangerous stage of the Baloch separatist movement.

#### The Taliban and al-Qaeda

U.S. officials identify Balochistan as a critical center of Taliban and al-Qaeda activity. Many observers believe that high-profile al-Qaeda figures and ranking Taliban members, including Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Muhammad Omar, have fled Afghanistan or Pakistan's tribal areas for sanctuary in Balochistan. The provincial capital of Quetta is believed to serve as a critical hub for financing and organizing Taliban and al-Qaeda operations (*Dawn*, September 30). Islamabad's intelligence service is often accused of protecting Afghan Taliban members in Balochistan, namely the powerful Taliban faction led by Mullah Omar known as the Quetta Shura. Pakistan disputes the very existence of the Quetta Shura, choosing instead to lay the blame for the resurgence of the Taliban and the deteriorating security situation in South Asia on what it describes as the failure of the U.S.-led mission to stabilize Afghanistan (*Dawn*, September 27). Because of its geographic proximity to the tribal areas, Balochistan is open to a spillover of violence and radicalism. The emergence of Baloch-based militants aligned with the Taliban, namely the obscure Tehrik-e-Taliban Balochistan (TTB), is indicative of the larger concerns regarding the spread of radicalism in the region (*The News*, March 4).

Because Balochistan borders Afghanistan, including Helmand province—a center for Taliban operations against NATO forces—Islamabad worries that an escalation of the U.S.-led campaign in Helmand and other parts of Afghanistan will compel Afghan militants to use Balochistan as a temporary sanctuary to evade direct engagements with U.S. forces. Afghan militants may also use Balochistan as a staging ground for attacks

against NATO forces in Helmand and beyond. In other words, Pakistan fears that Balochistan may go the way of FATA and the NWFP following the U.S. invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, a dangerous scenario, to say the least. Afghan militants may also wreak havoc in Balochistan by launching attacks inside the province, particularly against religious minorities such as the small Shi'a community, a frequent object of radical Sunni Islamist ire. In fact, Balochistan has seen a spike in sectarian attacks over the last few years (AFP, March 4). Pakistan's Prime Minister Yousef Raza Gilani has expressed concern over a possible influx of militants in Balochistan after U.S. reinforcements arrive in Afghanistan (*The Nation*, November 27). This is a nightmare scenario for Pakistan since it also has the potential to invite a more aggressive U.S. policy of launching drone attacks in Balochistan.

Tribal militants fleeing the Pakistani military's offensive in the tribal areas may also use nearby Balochistan as a temporary base. The problems affecting Balochistan are severe, considering that the region serves as one of the crucial logistical hubs sustaining the U.S.-led military campaign in Afghanistan. Convoys ferrying fuel, vehicles, arms, food, and other crucial items to U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan travel through Balochistan. The first confirmed attack against a NATO convoy in Balochistan occurred in June in Chaman City, near the Afghan border (*Times of India* [New Delhi], June 3). Militants struck again in September in an attack against a NATO fuel convoy passing near Quetta, setting eight oil tankers ablaze (UPI, September 9). Vital supply routes used by NATO in Balochistan are likely to come under increasing attack as the escalation in Afghanistan unfolds, consequently raising a new set of challenges.

### Opium and Organized Crime

Pakistani Balochistan plays a critical role as one of the world's busiest and most dangerous opium smuggling hubs, where the borders of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran converge. Known as the Golden Crescent, the region is home to scores of powerful organized crime networks, especially criminal organizations engaged in drug smuggling and opium production. Not surprisingly, the rapid expansion of opium cultivation in Afghanistan in recent years has provided a boon to regional drug smugglers.

Ethnic Baloch-led criminal gangs based in Pakistani Balochistan (some of which associate with ethnic Baloch insurgent groups as well as Taliban factions based on

mutual business interests as opposed to ideology or politics) figure prominently in the smuggling of opium out of Afghanistan (*Asia Times*, October 22).

### Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Pakistan is home to one of the largest refugee populations in the world with almost 1.8 million refugees on its soil. [2] Pakistani Balochistan is home to generations of refugees, mostly ethnic Pashtuns who fled Afghanistan following the Soviet invasion in 1979, as well as refugees who fled the country more recently. Balochistan is also home to IDP camps housing upwards of 200,000 ethnic Baloch forced to flee various parts of the province as a result of Islamabad's military operations against Baloch separatists in the region. [3]

UNHCR estimates that upwards of 2 million people - nearly all ethnic Pashtuns - were forced to flee their homes during the fighting between Pakistani security forces and tribal militants in the FATA and NWFP [4] The massive scale of the displacement of Pashtuns from the tribal areas to other parts of Pakistan, including Balochistan, has caught Pakistani, U.S., and international authorities by surprise. The migration of IDPs into Balochistan and other parts of Pakistan will have a serious social and political impact on Pakistan's society and economy that may ultimately threaten political stability. Baloch activists, for instance, often accuse Islamabad and the international community of favoring Pashtun refugees and IDPs in Balochistan at the expense of ethnic Baloch IDPs for political reasons. Some Baloch observers believe that Islamabad is exploiting the refugee and IDP crisis in Balochistan to further diminish Baloch influence through demographic changes. [5] The recent decision by the United Nations to withdraw much of its staff from parts of Pakistan - including Balochistan - due to security concerns will also exacerbate matters in the months ahead, adding another set of challenges to Pakistan's embattled domestic institutions (*Dawn*, November 2).

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## Notes:

1. TAPI is sometimes referred to as the Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline (TAP).
2. See “Country Operations Profile: Pakistan,” Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), December 1, 2009, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/tehis/vtx/page?page=49e487016>.
3. See “Differing Estimates of Displacement Due to Conflict in Balochistan,” Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), April 2008.
4. See “UNHCR Global Appeal 2010-2011 – Pakistan,” December 1, 2009, <http://www.unhcr.org/4b03ffb19.html>.
5. Malik Siraj Akbar, “Afghan Refugee vs. Baloch IDPs,” July 4, 2008, <http://gmcmissing.wordpress.com/2008/07/04/afghanistan-refugees-vs-baloch-idps/>.