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AL-QAEDA IDEOLOGUE RULES ON PERMISSIBILITY OF MASS-CASUALTY MARKET BOMBINGS

Al-Qaeda's al-Fajr Media Center has released a religious ruling on the permissibility of mass-casualty attacks in public places like markets. Written by Shaykh Atiyatullah, the ruling came in response to an inquiry into the October 28, 2009 market bombing in Peshawar. The bombing was carried out through the detonation of 150 kg of explosives hidden in a parked car, and it devastated the Mina Bazaar of Peshawar, reserved for the use of women and children. Over 100 people were killed and 200 wounded, mostly women. At the time, both the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and al-Qaeda denied involvement in the attack, which sparked widespread outrage (*The News* [Islamabad], October 29, 2009; *Dawn* [Karachi], October 30).

In the format typical of such rulings, a questioner asked whether it was permissible in Islam to celebrate the deaths of "shoppers, merchants and the general populace," given what the questioner asserted to be the victim's "serious shortcomings in matters of religion, thinking only about their worldly life and sustenance, refraining from jihad, deserting the mujahideen, and living under the authority of an apostate government?"

Shaykh Atiyatullah's ruling starts out in a promising fashion with a strong condemnation of such attacks, saying that Muslims are obliged to object to them as means of spreading corruption, falsehood, oppression and transgression. In



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

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short, they are “contrary to the pure religion of Islam.” According to the shaykh, “It is a religious fact known to all that it is forbidden to transgress against a Muslim’s life... It is considered one of the greatest of sins after shirk [polytheism].”

Based on these considerations, Shaykh Atiyatullah draws the conclusion that these types of bombings could not have been carried out by the mujahideen, whose activities never transgress the laws of Islam. “We firmly believe that they are carried out by the enemies of Allah, either through criminal security contractors such as Blackwater [Xe Services LLC] and their likes, or other filthy groups working under Pakistani intelligence [Inter-Services Intelligence – ISI] or some criminal impure generals in the army.” The Shaykh alleges that the purpose of these bombings is to discredit the mujahideen and destroy their image in the Islamic world while scaring Muslims away from participating in jihad.

Shaykh Atiyatullah provides a lengthy quotation from an earlier statement by al-Qaeda’s commander in Afghanistan, Shaykh Mustafa Abu al-Yazid (a.k.a. Shaykh Saeed al-Masri) on the Peshawar bombing (ansarnet.info, November 11, 2009). Part of the passage cited by Atiyatullah similarly claims the bombing and all those like it to be the work of Blackwater and Western intelligence agencies in league with the apostate rulers of Muslim nations:

We believe that such bombings are the work of the Crusaders, the enemies of God, and their allies in the government and intelligence. It is part of the dirty war that they practice. How could that not be when they are the ones who mean harm to Muslims? They do not have any consideration for any sanctity and Muslim blood is worthless to them. Today, everyone knows that Blackwater and other criminal groups have violated Pakistan with support from [Pakistan’s] corrupt and criminal government and its security agencies. They commit these ugly actions and blame them on the mujahideen through their media outlets in order to tarnish the image of the mujahideen and Muslims.

Shaykh Atiyatullah pauses to consider the possibility that some of these mass-casualty attacks on civilians may have been committed by the mujahideen, noting that if this is so, the culprits “are not mujahideen, but rather havoc-wreaking criminals... But in reality the

probability of this is negligible, and all praise is due to Allah, the mujahideen can certainly not do this.”

AFGHAN PRESIDENT HAMID KARZAI ADMITS TO COVERT TALKS WITH MULLAH OMAR’S TALIBAN

In an Arabic-language interview carried on January 29 by al-Jazeera, Afghanistan president Hamid Karzai acknowledged that covert talks with Mullah Omar’s Taliban began nearly 15 months ago in Saudi Arabia and suggested NATO had made “major errors” in the defense of his regime.

With regard to trying American, British or NATO soldiers for killing Afghan civilians, Karzai confirmed his desire to have suspects delivered over to his government for justice. “We want this and we demand it.” At the same time, the president said it was his intention to follow through with his campaign pledge to “free every Afghan prisoner” held in American prisons in Afghanistan. “I hope that the U.S. side will understand this as an indispensable need in order to win the trust of the Afghan people so that they might continue their journey with us. In order that the United States might succeed in Afghanistan this thing must happen.”

While acknowledging the Afghan National Army was not yet capable of ensuring national security, Karzai laid the bulk of the blame for Afghanistan’s deteriorating security conditions at the feet of NATO. “Both sides are responsible... The Afghan forces were not strong enough and they made mistakes. The NATO forces made major errors.” Karzai suggests that the bulk of the Taliban forces are composed of young men without hope or shelter and distinguishes between these young men and “the terrorists” that must be defeated in Afghanistan. “That is what I want the NATO forces to understand; namely, that the war against terrorism should not be waged in Afghanistan’s villages; it does not mean pursuing every man with a beard and a turban, or anyone who dons the Afghan traditional outfit.”

The president confirmed recent rumors that members of his government had met with a Taliban delegation approved by Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Muhammad Omar in Saudi Arabia in September 2008. “Yes, this happened sometime ago. They are Afghans and we also are Afghans and we have known each other since the days of jihad against the Soviets. There was cooperation between me and Taliban when this movement appeared.

I know them very well.” The talks in Mecca were reportedly initiated after a senior Saudi official traveled to Pakistan’s North Waziristan Tribal Agency in an attempt to meet with top Taliban leaders and al-Qaeda’s deputy leader, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri. Though the Saudi official failed to meet anyone other than third-tier Taliban commanders, the effort led to the organization of secret talks in Mecca sponsored by the Saudis and attended by American officials. Though nothing came of these talks due to the Taliban’s insistence on an American withdrawal before negotiations could begin, parleys facilitated by Pakistan’s Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) and Saudi Arabia’s General Intelligence Directorate (GID) are reported to be ongoing (*The News* [Islamabad], February 6). Karzai announced on January 28 that he had made a formal request to Saudi Arabia’s King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud for help in facilitating talks with the Taliban (*The News*, January 28).

Karzai denied the existence of direct talks between himself and Mullah Omar. “Unfortunately I cannot find him and talk to him directly. If I can find his telephone number or his address I will certain contact him.” In another interview several days later, Karzai expressed his hope for reconciliation with Mullah Omar and the Taliban leader’s return to Afghanistan – under one condition: “Mullah Omar is first and foremost an Afghan, and we want all Afghans to return. Afghanistan is a democratic country, but it is also an Islamic country, and the Taliban know that... The rejection of al-Qaeda and terrorist networks is an absolute prerequisite [for reconciliation]” (*Der Spiegel*, January 31).

The Insurgent Rationale in Iraq

By Ramzy Mardini

The string of high-profile bombings that followed the withdrawal of U.S. combat forces from Iraqi cities on June 30, 2009 exposed not only Iraqi security shortcomings, but also the continued effectiveness of the insurgents to carry out demanding operations. These types of operations suggest the militants are choosing high-profile terrorism as a strategy for undermining counterinsurgency efforts, targeting the confidence and trust of the population in the government as a way of ensuring a climate of uncertainty, feeble governance, and organizational survival.

A new security challenge emerged when U.S. combat forces exited Iraqi cities in accordance with the Status of Forces Agreement arranged by the outgoing Bush administration. Without U.S. combat forces patrolling side-by-side with Iraqi soldiers in urban areas, deterrence-by-denial becomes less credible, bestowing to insurgents a new rational basis for exploiting a weaker security apparatus.

Sunni insurgent groups and Shi’a militias invested much time and resources to gain and hold territory during the height of the insurgency (2005-2007), but militant strongholds were uprooted over the course of a population-centric counterinsurgency carried out by U.S. and Iraqi forces. The loss of territorial possession has forced a smarter, albeit less resourceful, insurgency. It has evolved from being centered on a costly and preoccupying defensive posture to a purely offensive and asymmetric terrorist campaign.

By building confidence and trust between the population and protection forces, counterinsurgency fosters a rational framework for locals to cooperate and provide intelligence without fearing retribution. This public engagement forces upon militants a higher demand for secrecy in avoiding exposure, likely leading to a greater inclination towards political assassination operations.

This was the case on February 7, when gunmen with silencers in the Raas al-Jada area of western Mosul assassinated Dr. Soha Abdullah Jarallah – a female political candidate and part of former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi’s al-Iraqiya coalition (*Aswat al-Iraq*, February 7). Preceding the December 30, 2009 twin bombings in al-Anbar that killed 30, wounded over 100 and severed the hand of Governor Qassim Mohammed Abid al-Fahdawi, a series of nearly 40 assassination attempts targeted tribal, religious, security, and political figures in the province.

With the increased need for secrecy coupled with limited resources, insurgent groups are likely to better utilize their force-multiplier advantages and existing assets, while adopting cautious operational assessments. The three highly coordinated, mass-casualty Baghdad bombings since the June 30, 2009 withdrawal (occurring on August 19, 2009; October 25, 2009; and December 8, 2009) are a testament that the adversary recognizes the effectiveness of infrequent, high-profile attacks on government symbols in influencing the minds of Iraqis.

In addition, with a more capable and visible central government in Baghdad, the incentive for insurgent

groups to pool resources and cooperate with one another has increased. An example may be found in the Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqah al-Naqshabandiyah (JRTN), a militant Sufi movement with ties to Ba'athist leaders including Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri. The movement is known to have formed new ties to other Sunni insurgent groups (see *Terrorism Focus*, February 21, 2007; July 28, 2008). In November 2009, U.S. General Raymond Odierno suggested that al-Qaeda in Iraq was also collaborating with Ba'athist elements, recognizing that AQI "has now become more and more dominated by Iraqi citizens" rather than foreign jihadis (Reuters, November 18, 2009).

Because no openly defined militant stronghold exists, the battleground for combating the insurgency has become undefined as well. Insurgents can now decide when and where to become active members of the resistance, rationally choosing to fight—or not fight—depending upon which side is advantaged. This was noticeable during Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's Mosul offensive in May 2008, codenamed Za'eer al-Assad (Lion's Roar), which disappointed some Iraqi commanders who were expecting a hardened resistance amongst the militants.

Instead of engaging armies in guerilla warfare, the insurgents favor exploiting areas of political and ethnic sensitivity with the intention of inflaming inter-ethnic tensions. Their assassination campaign against the Sahwa (Awakening) Movement coerces fearful and disgruntled Sunnis to opt out of the fight against insurgents, while the Shi'a-led government continues to arrest many senior Sahwa officials on the grounds of supporting terrorism. On January 23, all 13,000 Sahwa fighters in Diyala province left their posts in protest of Baghdad's harassment campaign against them (*Aswat al-Iraq*, January 23).

Insurgents are also fueling dangerous suspicions between Sunni Arabs and Kurds by exploiting the debate on the "disputed territories" in Ninawa province, compounding the rising tensions between the Sunni Arab provincial governor Atheel al-Nujaifi and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) (*Aswat al-Iraq*, August 14, 2009; Niqash, February 24, 2009; *Kurdish Globe*, February 6). Tensions have risen to the verge of armed conflict on multiple occasions, only to be defused by the intervention of U.S. combat forces.

The debate over Article 140 – a constitutional provision that aims to settle the dispute over territorial ownership between the KRG and the national government – remains

unresolved and a potential rationale for a second civil war. In addition, the first post-Saddam census has been delayed until after the scheduled withdrawal of all U.S. combat forces in August 2010 (*Aswat al-Iraq*, August 31, 2009). Along with the March 2010 parliamentary election, these political proceedings offer real venues for exploitation and destabilization by insurgents.

The objectives of the insurgent groups have narrowed and become more realistic because they have ceased to be territorially defined. Strategic and tactical assessments are no longer about gaining territory, but rather to complicate counterinsurgency activities by instilling in the public a sense of uncertainty, suspicion, insecurity, and dwindling confidence in the Iraq government. The lack of a territorial baseline has now forced militants to think prudently about how to effectively confront their adversary, as the power to coerce rather than control becomes the standard for operational planning.

Ramzy Mardini was Special Assistant on Iranian Studies at the Center for Strategic Studies in Amman, Jordan and a former Iraq Desk Officer for Political Affairs at the Department of State. He has also served within the Executive Office of the President.

The People of Righteousness: Iraq's Shi'a Insurgents Issue Demands for Hostages

By Rafid Fadhil Ali

The second man in the Iraqi Shi'a insurgent group Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (The People of Righteousness – AAH), Shaykh Akram al-Ka'abi recently gave his first interview to the mainstream pan-Arab media. Al-Ka'abi talked to the London-based magazine *al-Majalla*, where he revealed that the AAH held two hostages, an American and a Briton, and would not release them without a deal that included the release of AAH prisoners, as well as other conditions (*al-Majalla*, February 2).

A few weeks ago the AAH, which has split from Muqtada al-Sadr's Jaish al-Mahdi (al-Mahdi Army – JAM), secured the release of its leader Qais al-Khaz'ali, who had been held in an American prison since March 2007 (See *Militant Leadership Monitor*, January 30).

The release of al-Khaz'ali came after the AAH handed over British hostage Peter Moore, who was kidnapped in Baghdad in 2007. Last summer the release of a number of AAH figures coincided with the handover of the bodies of three of the four bodyguards who were kidnapped along with Moore (see *Terrorism Monitor*, June 25, 2009).

Although both the Iraq and British government denied there was a prisoner exchange deal in the works with the AAH, al-Ka'abi stressed in the interview that there were negotiations with the Iraqi government but not the British. He named Iraqi Shi'a MP Sami al-Askari, an associate to Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, as the government's representative.

Al-Ka'abi stated that the remaining British hostage is Alan McMenemy, one of Peter Moore's four bodyguards. The bodies of the other three were handed over to the Iraqi government last year and passed on to the British embassy in Baghdad. The UK Foreign Office maintains that McMenemy was killed some time ago but is still seeking the return of his body (*Telegraph*, January 4).

In the interview, al-Ka'abi began by describing the history of the AAH:

Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq was founded under the name Ahl al-Kahf [The People of the Cave] right after the battle of Najaf in 2004. Muqtada al-Sadr decided then to stop the military operations. But many field commanders wanted to continue with the resistance. Consequently we worked to reorganize our troops independently. Based on the experiences of the battles of 2004 against the Occupier [i.e. the Coalition forces], we changed the tactics of the resistance. Brother Qais al-Khaz'ali and I were in charge of the JAM at that time. I ran the battle in Najaf and he ran the battle in Baghdad. We assigned other commanders in the provinces.

When asked about the relations of the AAH with Iran and its elite Revolutionary Guard, al-Ka'abi answered:

Iran is a neighboring Islamic country; we respect it and we have good relations with it, especially since The Islamic Republic [of Iran] supports all of the resistance movements, like the Lebanese Hizbollah, the Palestinian Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard is a

group of mujahideen, holy fighters who follow the principles of the Islamic Revolution [i.e. the Iranian Revolution of 1979]. There are many clerics and scholars among them. They have good relations with most of the Iraqi and regional parties.

Al-Ka'abi went on to praise the leader of the Lebanese Shi'a Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah. When asked if AAH elements received training in Lebanon, al-Ka'abi apologized, saying that he could not answer due to security reasons.

Al-Ka'abi stressed that the AAH has not killed Iraqis and was not involved in Sunni – Shi'a sectarian violence. Nevertheless, the AAH is criticized by many Sunnis in Iraq as one of the militias involved in sectarian killing. Such accusations have been echoed lately by some Shi'a as well. The AAH is currently trying to deny such accusations. Among the first items placed on the group's website was a statement denying the allegations:

Like the other resistance and liberation movements, our resistance was subjected to false accusations by the Occupier's tools. We did not care about that because we know the sources, the reasons and the goals of such accusations. But what hurts us, and hurts all free resistance members and the honorable Sadrist, is to have such accusations [made] by our brothers and our own people (iraq-moqawama.com, February 2).

To demonstrate the importance of the AAH in Iraqi resistance operations, Al-Ka'abi listed the most prominent attacks carried out by his group:

- An attack on an American unit in Karbala in 2007.
- An October 10, 2006 attack on the American base Camp Falcon where more than a hundred soldiers were killed, according to al-Ka'abi. The U.S. military reported no casualties in what it described as an explosion in an ammunition dump at the base, but the AAH and rival Sunni insurgent groups argued over who was actually responsible for the explosion (al-Jazeera, October 24, 2009).
- The assassination of an American commander in Najaf (no details provided).

- An attack on a British helicopter in Basra in 2006. Al-Ka’abi claimed that it was brought down by the AAH and five soldiers, including a high-ranking commander, were killed. Al-Ka’abi is probably referring to the May 6, 2006 downing of a British Lynx helicopter by a shoulder-fired surface-to-air missile in the center of Basra. Five British service personnel were killed (BBC, April 27, 2007; UK Ministry of Defence, May 6, 2006; *Times*, May 8, 2006).
- An attack on the Polish ambassador to Iraq. This was an unsuccessful attempt to abduct Polish Ambassador Edward Pietrzyk on October 3, 2007 that wounded the ambassador and left five dead (al-Jazeera, October 3, 2007).

Al-Ka’abi pointed out that there were many other attacks and many of those are published on the internet. Regarding the kidnapping of the five British hostages, al-Ka’abi denied that they were moved or held in Iran; “Iran has nothing to do with that. The hostages have not been moved out of Iraq at all.”

According to al-Ka’abi, the American hostage is an American military translator of Iraqi descent, Spc. Ahmad Qusay al-Ta’ae, who was kidnapped in Baghdad in 2006. Though there are reports that al-Ta’ae was killed in 2006 by another group and his body transferred to the AAH, al-Ka’abi gave the impression the hostage was still alive (Reuters, February 6).

The AAH also placed a video on its newly-established website of what it described as a captured American officer (Iraq-moqawama.com, February 5). The video appears on the front page of the AAH website beside a copy of *al-Majalla’s* interview with al-Ka’abi. In the video a man appears in an American army uniform sitting in front of a black banner bearing the name of the AAH unit that has supposedly kidnapped the man – the Imam Ali al-Hadi Battalion. The man was identified as an American officer. Speaking English with a light Middle Eastern accent, the figure urges the American government to respond to the demands of the AAH. The man has since been identified as Issa Salomi, a civilian contractor and translator attached to the U.S. Army who was abducted on January 23. AAH’s demands for the release of the American hostages include:

- 1- Releasing the resistance prisoners who did not kill Iraqis.

- 2- Punishing the bodyguards of the American security firm Blackwater (now Xe Services LLC), who are accused of killing Iraqi civilians in 2007, and providing compensation to the families of their victims.

- 3- The complete withdrawal of all foreign troops in Iraq.

There is still some confusion over which American hostage al-Ka’abi was referring to in his interview, but a few days later an AAH spokesman confirmed that the group was holding two American hostages rather than one (*Asharq al-Awsat*, February 9). Part of the confusion stems from the AAH practice of still referring to dead captives as “hostages.”

The Iraqi government was clearly upset with the latest abduction. Sami al-Askari, the government negotiator with the AAH, said, “There was a truce with the AAH and the government helped them by releasing some of their detainees. But with the recent abduction they have broken the truce. Therefore we cannot release any more detainees” (*Asharq al-Awsat*, February 9).

Rafid Fadhil Ali is a freelance journalist based in Iraq who specializes in Iraqi insurgent groups.

Jihad and Islamism in the Maldivive Islands

By Animesh Roul

Maldivian President Mohammed Nasheed admitted in October, 2009 that hundreds of Maldivian Muslims had been recruited by Pakistan-based terrorist groups and are presently fighting against government forces in Pakistan. [1] The revelation by Nasheed was substantiated by video footage circulated by al-Qaeda’s media wing in November 2009, which not only proved Maldivians’ participation in the global jihad movement, but also demonstrated the impact of radical Islam on the psyche of Maldivian youth. Ali Jaleel (a.k.a. Musab Sayyid), a Maldivian national who had been fighting alongside pro-Taliban forces in Pakistan, was featured in that video. [2] Ali Jaleel died during the suicide attack on the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) headquarters in

Lahore on May 27, 2009 (Haeveeru Online, November 8, 2009).

Soon after, another video aimed at jihadi recruitment featured a previously unknown al-Qaeda cell operating in the Maldives. The short video flashed the message, “Your brothers in the Maldives are calling you.” This brief internet footage was perhaps a declaration of sorts for the establishment of the first al-Qaeda cell in the Maldives. The image in the video shows three men sitting together on a beach while another man is standing in the foreground near a coconut tree (Adnkronos International, November 20, 2009). Later it was confirmed that the video teaser was posted by the media wing of the lesser-known Ansar al-Mujahideen. [3]

In an earlier incident, Maldivian national Ibrahim Fauzee was arrested in Karachi, Pakistan, in May 2002 while living in a suspected al-Qaeda safe house. Fauzee, an Islamic cleric, was held in extrajudicial detention in the Guantanamo Bay detention camp until his release and repatriation to the Maldives in March 2005 (al-Jazeera, October 7, 2009). These and other incidents have sparked concerns about the spread of radical Islam in the Indian Ocean archipelago.

A Paradise for Radicalism

The Maldives, a Sunni Muslim majority island nation, is sometimes described as a paradise for Islamic radicalism. The country witnessed a terrorist strike for the first time in September, 2007, when a bomb explosion in the capital Male wounded 12 foreigners, including British, Japanese and Chinese tourists (*The Guardian*, September 30, 2007). The blast in Sultan Park was targeted at the thriving tourism industry, which is by and large the economic lifeline of the Maldives. Despite the economic benefits, many radical Islamic groups active in the Maldives have denounced tourism’s influence on the local Islamic culture.

Following the Sultan Park bombing, security agencies rounded up over 50 suspects, including a couple of Bangladeshi nationals. Many more fled to Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Two suspects wanted in the investigation, Abdul Latheef Ibrahim and Ali Shameem, had left the Maldives prior to the blast incident with the help of a sympathetic immigration official. Both suspects are believed to have traveled to Karachi via Sri Lanka. Three terrorists in their early 20s, Mohamed Sobah, Moosa Inaz, and Ahmed Naseer, were sentenced to 15

years in jail in connection with the Sultan Park bombing after confessing to their role in the attack during the trial. [4] They have reportedly admitted their goal was to “target, attack and injure non-Muslims to fulfill jihad.”

The bombing prompted the authorities to crack down on extremist elements holed up in the illegal Dhar-ul-Khair mosque on Himendu (or Himandhoo) Island in October 2007. The situation spiraled into a violent confrontation between the members of Dhar-ul-Khair mosque and security forces when the latter attempted to carry out a search and sweep operation. The Maldivian police and the Maldives National Defense Force (MNDF) successfully put down the radical rising and ended the hostage crisis in Dhar-ul-Khair in a scenario similar to the Lal Masjid standoff in Islamabad in July, 2007. Sixteen people were sentenced for the violent confrontation with police at Dhar-ul-Khair (Miadhu online, October 8, 2007; *The Guardian*, October 9, 2007).

The Pakistan Factor

There is growing evidence of Maldivian youths frequenting Pakistan for reasons unknown or suspicious in nature, though enrollment in various madrassas (Islamic seminaries) was usually cited as the prime reason for their travel. Intelligence agencies of the United States and India have noted this development with concern and believe that the growing religious extremism in Maldives is a Pakistani import.

In the early weeks of February 2010, nine alleged Maldivian terrorists who were arrested in Pakistan’s troubled South Waziristan tribal agency in March, 2009 were brought back to the Maldives. According to Maldivian police, these nine people have ties to the 2007 Sultan Park bombing and may have left the country for Pakistan via Sri Lanka for further training and indoctrination. The nine suspects, who were repatriated in two phases, included Yoosuf Izaadhy, Ahmed Ashraf, Abdullah Sameer, Ali Faiz, Moosa Yoosuf, Yoosuf Mohammed, Ali Shafeeq, Mohamed Zuhrey, and Ahmed Ali. (Haveruu Online, April 2, 2009; Minivan News, April 1, 2009; *Miadhu Daily*, February 8).

The infiltration of Pakistani militants in the Maldives goes back to the post-tsunami period. The Pakistan-based Idara Khidmat-e-Khalq (IKK), a charitable front of the Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), reached the Maldives in the wake of the December, 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami under the guise of providing humanitarian services. The

JuD is the political face of the Kashmir-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorist group. According to intelligence sources, the IKK spearheaded LeT's activities in the Maldives, which focused on drawing youths into its fold (rediff.com, September 10, 2009). The IKK reported spending \$282,000 in the Maldives, although the Maldivian government says the organization was never registered as a charitable group providing post-Tsunami relief (*The Hindu*, November 14, 2007).

Worried India

Neighboring India fears that the Maldives' territory will be used as a breeding ground for Islamist terrorists or as a launching pad for attacks against India. The Maldives are undoubtedly a fertile ground for jihadist recruitment, due to an already radicalized youth (the effect of schools and madrassas being taken over by Mullahs), the influence of the Islamist organization Jamiat Ahl e-Hadith and the persuasive power of Islamist propaganda urging Maldivians to fight to relieve the plight of fellow Muslims abroad. As such, the Maldives offer excellent prospects for global jihadi groups like the LeT and al-Qaeda. Even Maldivian President Mohammed Naseed believes that there is a Maldivian connection to LeT's November 2008 attack on Mumbai (Rediff.com, October 26, 2009). With increasing concern for the growing radicalization of Maldivian society, and as reports surfaced about the LeT's foray into the archipelago, the government announced in January that it would not allow its territory to be used for terrorist activities against its neighbors, especially India (Press Trust of India, February 4).

The LeT has been trying to set up bases in uninhabited islands in the Indian Ocean since early 2005 under the guise of carrying out charitable operations. In mid-2009, India's Intelligence Bureau (IB) issued a warning that the next big attack on Indian soil would be launched from the Maldives and that this threat necessitated the establishment of a robust coastal security apparatus (Rediff.com, July 7, 2009). The IB has also cautioned that terrorist groups like LeT were trying to infiltrate India's porous coastline (*Economic Times*, June 30, 2009). Though this alert seemed routine, the actual threat emanating from places like Maldives is not totally unfounded. Again this year, the IB issued intelligence reports about LeT's aggressive strategy, which has seen the movement deploy nearly 1,000 operatives in the Maldives (Rediff.com, February 4; Minivan News, February 4).

In April 2005, Kerala police arrested Maldivian national Asif Ibrahim, who had reportedly frequented the Indian state to procure arms and ammunition for the LeT's Maldives operations. Ibrahim confessed to having planned to blow up a government-run mosque and to assassinate then-Maldivian President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. Sabahuddin Ahmed, one of the prime suspects in the Mumbai carnage, has disclosed details of the LeT's Maldives chapter and the organization's attempt to recruit youths there (Rediff.com, December 19, 2008).

Salafi Jihad and Talibanization

On an official level, the Maldivian government has become involved in promoting a deal between the Taliban and the Afghan government. A secret meeting in January between Afghan government officials and a delegation that included representatives of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-i-Islami, along with seven men "with close links to the Taliban and respected by Mullah Omar" raised fears among some Maldivians over a perceived trend towards Taliban-style governance in the Maldives (Minivan News, January 28). [5]

The newly democratized Maldives has been coming under the grip of a Salafi-Jihadi ideology which is increasingly gaining currency among Maldivians, especially the youth. Radical political parties such as the Adhalaat (Justice) Party (part of the government coalition) are clamoring for Shari'a to be implemented. Adhalaat, which is sympathetic to the Taliban, also controls the nation's Ministry of Islamic Affairs. Another growing Salafi-Wahhabist organization is the Jamiat ul-Salaf, which is vehemently opposed to secularism within Muslim-dominated societies. Jamiat ul-Salaf supports Islamizing education in the country and promotes intolerance towards other religions, especially Christianity.

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs of the Maldives claims to have developed de-radicalization methods and has been taking measures to curb the activities of the various transnational Islamic organizations that have arrived in the Maldives in recent years (*Miadhru Daily*, April 12, 2009). However, the radical branch of Islam and its call for jihad against non-believers has many more supporters in the Maldives now than in the past and threatens to continue inducing Muslim youths in that country to join global jihadi groups.

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

Notes:

1. For a complete transcript of President Mohamed Nasheed's interview, See "Radicals in Pak recruiting our youth: Maldives", CNN-IBN, New Delhi, Oct 25, 2009.
2. See video of Ali Jaleel at http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=e1a_1257529338.
3. See the video at <http://threatswatch.org/rapidrecon/2007/11/ansar-almujahideen-targets-the>
4. Maldives Police Service, <http://www.police.gov.mv>, December 13, 2007.
5. Al-Jazeera TV, January 28 - <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia/2010/01/20101271653316762.html>

Bajaur Agency: The New Landscape of Insurgency in FATA

By Mukhtar A. Khan

Amid conflicting reports that Pakistani Taliban Chief Hakimullah Mahsud has succumbed to his injuries after being targeted in a U.S. drone attack last month, there is also news that the deputy chief of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Maulvi Faqir Mohammad, has resigned from his position as TTP leader in Bajaur Agency after developing differences with other Taliban leaders in the region (*The Nation* [Islamabad], February 2; *The News* [Islamabad], February 1). Maulvi Faqir has been replaced as TTP leader in Bajaur by Maulvi Mohammad Jamal ud-Din. Maulvi Faqir was a close confidante of Baitullah Mahsud, the former TTP chief who was killed in a U.S. drone attack in August, 2009. When there was a vacuum in leadership after Baitullah's death, Maulvi Faqir declared himself the new chief of the TTP. He later withdrew from the position when the Taliban shura (council) appointed Hakimullah as its leader. Until recently, Maulvi Faqir enjoyed unprecedented control over the Bajaur Taliban and other militant organizations in the area. His differences with other Taliban and militant leaders surfaced when he advised them not to attack Pakistani security forces in the Bajaur area (*Dawn*

[Karachi], January 29). Since then he has fallen under suspicion among the inner Taliban circles as a covert advocate of the so-called "strategic depth" ideology of Pakistan's military leadership. A concept advanced for three decades by Pakistan's military and civilian establishment, "strategic depth" calls for ensuring that the Afghanistan government is pro-Pakistan and anti-India, thus relieving the need to maintain large forces on Pakistan's western border.

Military Offensive Against Militants

Since August 2008, Bajaur has seen major anti-terrorist military operations. The Pakistani government claimed to have cleared the area of all sorts of militants in February, 2009, but the claim had little reality on the ground. Several militant organizations in the Bajaur area remained active during this period and continued to carry out attacks against U.S. and NATO forces across the border in Afghanistan. However, the current military operations in Bajaur are believed to be the first serious offensive there against the Taliban and other local and foreign militants, including Uzbeks and some Arabs (Geo TV, February 1).

In a swift operation against militants in Bajaur, the Pakistani security forces have captured the Taliban stronghold of Sewai, taking the town in a fierce but brief fight on January 31 (*The News*, February 1). Helicopter gunships and jet fighters targeted the Taliban's hideouts and destroyed their bunkers in the days prior to the battle (*Daily Times* [Lahore], January 26). This was a sensitive and important area of Bajaur where the Taliban had established their own courts and built several underground bunkers. Sewai was used for holding shura meetings of the Taliban and all-important decisions were made here. The nearby town of Bajaur—Mamund Tehsil—is the birthplace of Maulvi Faqir Mohammad. Pakistani security forces have succeeded in occupying some parts of the strategic mountainous region known as Khazai Ghar.

The Pakistani security forces have taken control of the strategically valuable area around the Bajaur village of Damadola and they continue to advance. Damadola is known for its training camps for militants. It is believed that Osama bin Laden's deputy, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri frequently visited this region until February 2006, when he was targeted there by a CIA drone attack. Al-Zawahiri was not present, but the attack left 18 civilians dead. Following a January 30 suicide attack that killed 17 people, including security personnel, Pakistan's

paramilitary Frontier Corps mounted a new offensive coordinated with attacks by Pakistani fighter-jets. The renewed operations were reported to have killed as many as 15 militants, including four foreign fighters (*Dawn* [Karachi], February 4; *The Nation*, February 5; *Daily Times*, February 5).

In military operations over the past two years, the government has remained unable to demonstrate its strength and maintain its writ over strategic regions of Bajaur such as Khazai Ghar, Damadola and Loi Sam, all of which border the Kunar province of Afghanistan, infamous for its persistent Taliban insurgency (BBC Urdu, February 1). Kunar has been the site of some of the deadliest attacks on U.S. and Coalition forces and has easy road access to Nuristan province, yet another hotspot for the Taliban insurgency. Saudi-style Wahhabism has a significant influence in these areas due to Arab investments in Wahhabi madrassas. The Soviets faced stiff resistance in Kunar and were badly defeated there before withdrawing to Kabul.

Attraction for Militancy

With Bajaur's utility as a staging point and resting place for attacks on the bordering Afghan provinces of Kunar and Nuristan, the region has attracted a great number of militants from various jihadi organizations, both local and foreign. Until recently, Maulvi Faqir Mohammad and Qari Ziaur Rahman were the most influential militant leaders. However, two other names have now come to prominence: the aforementioned Maulana Mohammad Jamal ud-Din (a.k.a. Maulvi Dadullah) and a commander named Burhanuddin, who is reportedly the new deputy chief of the Bajaur TTP (*Dawn*, January 29). The change in leadership has taken place in view of differences between Taliban over how to react to a Pakistani government military offensive (Aaj TV, February 1).

Qari Ziaur Rahman, an Afghan jihadi commander with close ties to the TTP leadership, has struggled to form a consensus among the Bajaur Taliban, but apparently he has been unsuccessful. Qari Ziaur is considered to be a commander of great influence and power on both sides of the border. In late 2008, he inflicted heavy casualties on Pakistani security forces while siding with the TTP. Qari Ziaur leads a group of trained fighters which includes Uzbeks, Turkmens, Afghans and Arabs (*Daily Times* [Lahore], October 24, 2008). He is wanted by the U.S. government and has a bounty on his head of \$350,000. He was once arrested by the Pakistan

government but was later released in an exchange of prisoners with the TTP. Qari Ziaur maintains close ties with Taliban supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar and is also a member of his shura.

Besides Qari Ziaur's group and the TTP, the Bajaur tribal region is home to several other jihadi organizations and their leaders. Common to all of them is the Wahhabi view of jihad. The Tehrik-e-Nifazi Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) has acted as a foundation for the Wahhabi ideology. Forty-year-old Maulvi Faqir Mohammad was an active member of TNSM before joining the ranks of TTP. The teaching and preaching of TNSM founder Maulana Sufi Mohammad has contributed to the radicalization of a vast area of Bajaur. During the U.S. attack on Afghanistan that followed 9/11, Sufi Mohammad gathered some 10,000 fighters to wage jihad against U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

The Harkat-ul-Jihadi Islami (HuJI) of Qari Saifullah Akhtar and the Jaish-e-Islami (JeI) of Qari Wali Rahman have also established jihadi bases in the Bajaur area. Likewise, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) also have a presence in the area (see *Terrorism Monitor*, March 19, 2009). A year ago, these militant outfits were very strong and active, but after successive military operations they were rendered inactive and have retreated to the mountains.

Conclusion

The hitherto invincible stronghold of militancy in Bajaur is gradually falling into the hands of the Pakistani government. There is resistance in some areas to the operations of the security forces, but as a whole the militants are withdrawing fast from their positions. Is this a part of the Taliban's tactical strategy or they have really been weakened? The answer could be both. These days the Taliban are faced with leadership crises and a growing disrespect for the Pakistani Taliban among the local Pashtuns. After tasting the death and destruction brought by the militants' terrorist actions, there has been a growing realization among the civil and military establishment that they can no longer tolerate militant ideologies in the name of establishing a so-called strategic depth. Pakistan's Army Chief Ashfaq Pervez Kayani has already hinted at such a shift in his recent talks with the media (*The News* [Islamabad], February 2). The army has started signaling that the militants will no longer be handled softly. At the same time, however, the Army is looking for a broader regional solution to the ongoing crises with an aim secure Pakistan's eastern and

western borders. Pakistan's establishment is following with interest the recent peace-building initiative with mainstream Taliban leaders in Afghanistan. This move has encouraged Pakistan to destroy the militants' refuges in Bajaur without any concessions. If reconciliation efforts with the Taliban fail in Afghanistan, the hide-and-seek game between the military and militants on the Pakistani side of the border could resume.

Mukhtar A. Khan is a Pashtun journalist based in Washington, D.C., covering the issues of Taliban and al-Qaeda in Pakistan-Afghanistan border regions.