



Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

VOLUME VIII, ISSUE 17 ♦ APRIL 29, 2010

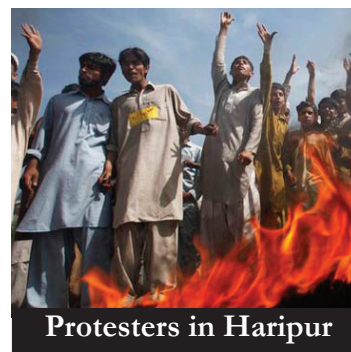
IN THIS ISSUE:

BRIEFS.....1

IRANIAN NAVAL EXERCISES DISPLAY ADVANCEMENTS IN IRGC ARMED CAPABILITIES
By Nima Adelkhah.....3

HUJI OPERATIONS EXPAND BEYOND THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT
By Animesh Roul.....4

THE HAZARA DIVISION OF PAKISTAN – GROWING TALIBANIZATION AMIDST POLITICAL
INSTABILITY
By Tayyab Ali Shah.....6



Protesters in Haripur

Terrorism Monitor is a publication of The Jamestown Foundation. The Terrorism Monitor is designed to be read by policy-makers and other specialists yet be accessible to the general public. The opinions expressed within are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of The Jamestown Foundation.

Unauthorized reproduction or redistribution of this or any Jamestown publication is strictly prohibited by law.

SHAYKH ABU AL-HARITH DESCRIBES SALAFIST OPPOSITION TO HAMAS AND ISRAEL

As Hamas struggles with the transition from militant group to government in Gaza, the movement has lost much of the initiative in its confrontation with Israel to a number of Salafi-Jihadi groups that promise uncompromising resistance to Hamas and Israel alike. In a recent interview with a Palestinian news agency, Shaykh Abu al-Harith, leader of Jund Ansar Allah (Army of the Supporters of God) described the current state of the Salafist opposition, which he claims now has 11,000 active supporters distributed between four main groups: Jund al-Islam, Tawhid wa'l-Jihad, Jund Ansar Allah and Jund Allah (Ma'an News Agency, April 18).

Abu al-Harith insists none of the Salafist groups in Gaza have real ties with al-Qaeda, but all are highly influenced by al-Qaeda ideology, the success of the 9/11 attacks and various high-profile suicide operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Shaykh described the main ideological influences of the Salafi-Jihadi groups in Gaza, citing the works of Shaykh Ibn Taymiyah (1263-1328) and Shaykh Ibn al-Qayyim (1292-1350), both of whom provided the foundation for the takfiri approach adopted by most Salafist radicals. In the modern era, al-Harith cites Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, the Jordanian ideologue of jihad who was once a spiritual mentor to the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, former leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq. In keeping with the basis of the takfiri philosophy, al-Harith describes the individuals in the Fatah leadership in the West Bank as "apostates."



For comments or questions about our publications, please send an email to pubs@jamestown.org, or contact us at:

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

Copyright ©2009

Though Gaza Salafist groups began carrying out limited operations in 2001, it was Hamas's decision to enter the political process in 2006 that sparked a sudden growth in recruitment and development of the armed Salafist movements in Gaza. Nevertheless, al-Harith admits that the Salafist groups are not nearly as strong as Hamas and have suffered greatly in confrontations with that movement, such as the Hamas assault on the Ibn Taymiyah mosque in August 2009 that resulted in the death of Jund Ansar Allah leader Abdel-Latif Moussa after he prematurely declared an Islamic Emirate in Gaza (Ma'an, August 16, 2009). Security services in Gaza continue to track and arrest Salafist operatives. "We are under round-the-clock surveillance. Our activities are fraught with risks."

Where Hamas had once inspired its young followers with a commitment to jihad and resistance against Israel, its attempt to form a government did not resonate with many young fighters, who suddenly became available to the Salafist groups. Al-Harith notes that many of these had already obtained military training from the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades (the armed wing of Hamas), al-Nasir Salah al-Din Brigades and the Harakat al-Jihad al-Islam fi Filastin (Palestinian Islamic Jihad). Recruitment is done carefully, with extensive background checks followed by thorough training in Islam, security techniques and military tactics.

Perhaps because of the pressure put on the Salafist movements by Hamas, the Jund Ansar Allah spokesman appears to have moderated his earlier views on Hamas (as expressed in 2008). "The Muslim Brotherhood [i.e. Hamas] does not appreciate the approach of the pious ancestors [the Salaf], which means it should be eradicated" (Hanein.info, September 17, 2008). Al-Harith now insists the Salafist movements are not trying to destroy Hamas, but are instead seeking a religious dialogue with Hamas that would bring about the full implementation of Shari'a in Gaza. "We are not interested in opening an internal front against anyone. Our aim is to kill the Jews and apply the Shari'a."

A COUNTERTERRORISM NAVAL FORCE FOR BANGLADESH

After years of relative neglect, Bangladesh is initiating a major overhaul of its maritime security apparatus, designed not only to improve its coastal defenses against terrorists and organized crime, but also to create a navy capable of serving in international peacekeeping

operations, an important source of foreign currency for the largely impoverished nation.

Following a request from the Dhaka government, the United States has supplied 15 Defender Class patrol boats to the Bangladeshi Navy and Coast Guard to help secure the nation's extensive maritime borders. The 16 boats will come under the command of the Navy Special Operations Force, with a further six designated for use by the Bangladesh Coast Guard (*Daily Star* [Dhaka], April 13; Bangladesh News 24 Hours, April 13). According to the U.S. embassy, "This donation is the largest delivery of U.S. Coast Guard boats to any nation" (*New Nation* [Dhaka], April 14). U.S. forces will provide training in use of the new ships as part of the joint "Tiger Shark" exercise in late May. U.S. military units will concentrate on training elements of the Army, Navy and Coast Guard in counterterrorism operations, anti-piracy operations and general maritime security.

Manufactured by Safe Boats International in Washington State, the 25 foot (8 meter) boats are typically used in the United States for search and rescue, port security and law enforcement activities. Defender class boats can be armed with heavy machine guns and are capable of a speed of 46 knots.

Since its formation in 1971, the Bangladesh navy has focused on local waters, but took a major step towards international operations earlier this month by sending two warships, BNS *Osman* and BNS *Madhumati*, to join the maritime taskforce of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) (*Daily Star*, April 12). BNS *Osman* (the former PLAN *Xiangtan*) is a Chinese-built Jianghu class guided missile frigate that was involved in a 1988 naval skirmish with Vietnamese naval forces in the Spratley Islands. The smaller *Madhumati* is a Korean-built offshore patrol vessel, built by Hyundai and launched in 1997.

Unlike the navy, the Bangladesh army is well traveled, being one of the most prolific contributors to U.N. peacekeeping forces. Since 1988, the army has participated in 30 peacekeeping operations in 25 different countries. These operations are a major source of foreign currency for the government in Dhaka.

Only a day before the departure of the *Osman* and the *Madhumati*, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced the government's plan to transform the Bangladesh navy into a "three-dimensional force" through the addition

of submarines, maritime patrol aircraft, helicopters and two new Chinese-built frigates. The Korean-built Ulsan class frigate BNS *Bangabandhu* (formerly known as BNS *Khalid Bin Walid*), currently decommissioned despite being the navy's most advanced warship, will also be brought out of reserve (*Daily Star*, April 11).

The Bangladesh military is eager to erase some of the indignities suffered through a large-scale mutiny in the Bangladeshi Rifles (BDR) in February, 2009, in which 74 people were killed in a remarkably brutal fashion, including 57 officers and BDR chief Major General Shakil Ahmed (*Times of India*, April 7).

Iranian Naval Exercises Display Advancements in IRGC Armed Capabilities

By Nima Adelkhah

On April 22, the Iranian armed forces began an annual series of military exercises over the course of three days in the strategic Strait of Hormuz region (The Great Prophet 5) (IRNA, April 23; Press TV, April 23; Mehr, April 23; Keyhan, April 23). Named Payambar-e Azam 5 and carried out primarily by the naval forces of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the latest war games showcased the Guard's latest advancements in military technology (IRNA, April 24; Press TV, April 24). The exercises featured dozens of speedboats attacking target ships with rockets and newly built torpedoes. Iran also claimed to have introduced a sonar-proof, remote-controlled speedboat called "Ya Mahdi" (Press TV, April 24). The presumed prototype allegedly deploys "high-intensity rockets," though no further details were released and independent confirmation remains unavailable.

The IRGC claims the drills were displayed to show how Iran has become one of the strongest military powers in the world (Fars News, April 25). However, Iran typically exaggerates its naval strength, reclassifying supply ships as "battleships" and small frigates as "destroyers." In reality, Iran has no capital ships and has nothing on active service larger than a frigate (see *Terrorism Monitor*, October 1, 2009). The near impossibility of obtaining capital ships under the sanctions regime

appears to be behind Iran's focus on innovative naval tactics based on small craft.

The latest military games show the extent to which Iran has expanded its capabilities by manufacturing its own military weapons. Although most of this month's drill was naval in nature, the IRGC, which controls much of Iran's most sensitive military technology, has in recent years developed a major air-based ballistic missile complex, along with anti-ship cruise missiles (Keyhan, March 12; Iran Times, April 23). The origin of Iran's military technology program can be traced back to the years following the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), when various surface-to-sea and surface-to-surface missiles (with Shahab 3 as the most advanced type) were built by the IRGC with Russian assistance (IRNA, September 28, 2009; Fars, September 22, 2007). The new generation of smart bombs and cruise missiles with short and mid-range capabilities (such as the Sajil, Ghased-1, Ghadr and Nasr-1) introduced a new phase in the IRGC's missile industry (Fars News, March 7; Keyhan, March 12). This program underlined the fact that Iran's armed forces had shifted focus to a possible ground-based U.S.-led assault across the Afghan or Iraqi borders. In light of Iran's weak air force, largely dependent on 1970s vintage warplanes, the Iranian response to a ground attack would require a series of missile counter-assaults on the enemy's ground and air forces.

The recent introduction of unmanned surveillance aircraft and the February launch of a satellite have added a new intelligence collection asset to the IRGC's abilities (Keyhan, March 19; Raja, April 25; Fars News, April 25). Such developments underline an increasing shift toward a new military policy, that is, the advancement of "soft war" tactics in a way to counter U.S. and Israeli intelligence measures (Fars News, April 24). [1] In another strategic move, the naval war games also hint at possible preemptive measures to cut off not only the 40 % of the world's seaborne oil supplies that pass through the Hormuz Strait, but also the military supply chain that links U.S. forces based in Bahrain, the northern regions of the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman and the northern Arabian Sea (Press TV, April 22). For the most part, the IRGC's military capabilities are expanding on both tactical and strategic levels, including counter-intelligence activities, conventional warfare and asymmetrical warfare.

Tehran maintains a security strategy aimed at deterring potential U.S. or Israeli attacks on its territory—particularly its nuclear facilities—while strengthening

its regional power through the expansion of its military capabilities. The latest military exercise, therefore, was not only meant to show the United States how Iran can protect its territory with modern military technologies, especially in a volatile and strategic region like the Hormuz Strait, but also to reinforce the perception of Iran as a regional power among the Gulf Cooperation Council nations (GCC). [2] In many ways, Iranians know that a military assault, particularly in the post-conflict phase after an invasion, would be a daunting task for the United States. They also know any sort of military aggression would ultimately require the logistical support of Iraq and the GCC states to allow the U.S. Air Force to operate.

The latest military games thus serve as a warning to the Arab states against providing support to the United States, reducing the chance of an American attack from the Persian Gulf coastline. Seen in this way, it is not surprising to see the IRGC invite military representatives of Qatar to the war games (Fars News, April 24; al-Manar TV, April 24). The key here is to understand not just how Iranians perceive the threat of an American or Israeli attack, but the way they see the perilous possibility of regional support for such an assault.

Furthermore, the Payambar-e Azam 5 exercises are not merely used by the state to thwart possible external threats, but also to propagate its military power for an audience at home. In a significant way, the Islamic Republic, which continues to undergo a crisis of legitimacy since the 2009 presidential elections, hopes to regain its authority by displaying how it can protect the country and hence consolidate power.

Nima Adelkhab is an independent analyst based in New York. His current research agenda includes the Middle East, military strategy and technology, and nuclear proliferation among other defense and security issues.

Notes:

1. The concept of “Soft War” has been much discussed in Iranian military and political circles. A Soft War, according to an Iranian news agency, is “a set of deliberately hostile acts aimed at transforming the fundamental cultural values and identities of a society. This type of war can influence all social aspects of a political system, and can include such phenomena as

‘cultural invasions’ and ‘psychological operations.’” (ISNA, March 31).

2. The GCC is composed of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates.

HuJI Operations Expand Beyond the Indian Subcontinent

By Animesh Roul

Formed in 1984, the Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami (HuJI – Movement of Islamic Holy War) has fought Soviets in Afghanistan and Indians in Kashmir before expanding to Bangladesh. From its focused beginnings, HuJI has developed into an international jihadi group that appears ready to demonstrate its global reach. Recent HuJI activities display the group’s intention to expand beyond its traditional operational zone in Bangladesh, India and Kashmir.

Raja Lahrasib Khan, a suspected HuJI operative, was arrested in Chicago on charges of providing material support to al-Qaeda in late March 2010. Khan, a U.S. citizen of Pakistani origin, is suspected of planning a terrorist strike this August on a “big stadium” in the United States along with Pakistan based HuJI chief Ilyas Kashmiri, the notorious former Pakistani army commando who now commands the deadly 313 Brigade he created within HuJI. The 313 Brigade has operational ties with al-Qaeda (*Chicago Tribune*, March 30; *Times of India*, April 6). It is alleged that Khan transferred approximately \$950 from a currency exchange in Chicago to an unidentified recipient in Bimbur in Pakistan administered Kashmir (PAK). According to the charges, Khan believed Kashmiri was working directly for al-Qaeda and made efforts to deliver the money when Kashmiri indicated he needed funds to buy explosives (*Huffington Post*, April 5). Khan is believed to have met with Kashmiri at least once in Pakistan (Reuters, March 27).

Elsewhere, Golam Mostafa, a Bangladeshi-born British citizen and the U.K. HuJI unit chief, was arrested in Sylhet, Bangladesh for his alleged involvement in financing militant groups and attempts to reorganize terrorist organizations in the region, including Hizb

ut-Tahrir and Jama'ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (*New Nation* [Dhaka], April 18; for Hizb ut-Tahrir, see *Daily Independent* [Dhaka], April 29). Mostafa, a veteran of the anti-Soviet Afghan jihad and a fund raiser for the Bosnian mujahideen, was re-arrested almost 14 months after he came out of jail on a High Court bail order. According to Dhaka police authorities, the security agencies back in London have also leveled various money laundering charges and seized various incriminating documents from his Birmingham residence. He escaped to Bangladesh in 2007. A restaurateur by profession, Mostafa used to send funds from Birmingham through informal channels to further militancy in Bangladesh until 2007 (*Daily Star* [Dhaka], April 18).

In early December 2007, Mostafa was arrested while in possession of arms, ammunition and literature on explosives and jihad. He was convicted and sentenced to 17 years in prison. However, he was released on bail on February 23, 2009 and later confessed to having bribed a politician to obtain his bail.

Dhaka's Metropolitan Police Commissioner, AKM Shahidul Hoque, described the case against Mostafa:

Coming out of jail on bail, Mostofa was carrying out militant activities in the country and tried to get other arrested militant leaders freed... During his stay in Birmingham, U.K., until 2007, Mostofa had sent thousands of taka [the currency of Bangladesh] to militants active in Bangladesh. So, London police filed a case against him under the terrorist financing act of that country (*Daily Star*, April 17).

Continuing investigations revealed that Mostafa had close relations with other detained HuJI commanders, including Abdus Salam, Mufti Hannan and Faisal Mostafa. Faisal Mostafa is another British citizen and chief of the U.K.-based Green Crescent NGO and was allegedly involved in setting up an arms factory inside a madrassa (Islamic school) complex in Bhola. Golam Mostafa had served as an advisor to the Bhola Madrassa (*Daily Star*, April 19).

HuJI was founded by Qari Saifullah Akhtar in the early 1980s. A close associate of Talban chief Mullah Omar, Akhtar maintained operational ties with al-Qaeda. Under his leadership, HuJI became active in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. Suspected of masterminding the 2007 Benazir Bhutto

assassination and the 2008 Marriott hotel bombing, Akhtar remains an elusive figure. In his absence, Ilyas Kashmiri is believed to have held the reins of HuJI in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region.

Identifying itself as the "second line of defense for every Muslim," HuJI now has a significant, established presence in Central Asia, Africa and the Middle East. HuJI's presence in the United Kingdom and the United States came to the forefront with the recent arrests in Chicago and Sylhet. Well before the arrest of Raja Lahrasib Khan, the United States designated HuJI's Bangladesh franchise as a foreign terrorist organization in March 2008.

HuJI-Bangladesh (HuJI-B, a.k.a. Islami Dawat-e-Kafela - IDeK) is considered the most active of the group's franchises, having emerged in 1992 with direct support from Osama bin Laden and Pakistan intelligence agencies. The HuJI-B leadership endorsed Osama bin Laden's February 1998 "World Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and Crusaders" fatwa that declared U.S. citizens to be legitimate targets for attack. In response, U.S. Executive Order 13224 criminalizes the provision of material support to HuJI-B by U.S. citizens or people living under U.S. jurisdiction, and freezes all HuJI-B property and interests in the U.S. and in areas under U.S. jurisdiction. [1]

HuJI has grown over the years into one of the most powerful militant groups in South Asia, perhaps next only to Lashkar e Taiba, and its network is strongly embedded in the region. The development of a British-based fundraising network and a terrorist plot in the United States are evidence of HuJI's international designs and indicate the movement's jihad is spilling out of the Indian subcontinent.

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

Notes:

1. See, <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/other/des/102878.htm> and <http://www.ustreas.gov/offices/enforcement/ofac/programs/terror/terror.pdf>

The Hazara Division of Pakistan— Growing Talibanization amidst Political Instability and Ethnic Tensions

By Tayyab Ali Shah

Recently the terrorism-battered northwest frontier of Pakistan was hit by another kind of mayhem when the previously peaceful Hazara Division of the former North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) witnessed bloody clashes between police and rioters over the issue of renaming the province “Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa” (*Dawn* [Karachi], April 12; SANA, April 14). The new official name was chosen over Khyber-Pashtunkhwa, but has essentially the same meaning (*Dawn*, April 1). The rioters were Sunni Hindko speakers, the majority community in Hazara Division, where Pashtun-speakers are a minority. Hindko is also spoken in parts of the Punjab and Kashmir. [1]

The otherwise tranquil city of Abbottabad (named for a British official), the main town in the Hazara Division, reverberated with gunfire between police and local people protesting against the renaming of the province. The violence left seven dead and more than a hundred injured. Led mainly by the Pakistan Muslim League - Quaid-e-Azam (PML-Q - a party also nicknamed the “King’s Party” after it was created by former military dictator General Pervez Musharraf), people came onto the streets to oppose the renaming clause in the 18th amendment to the constitution of Pakistan. The bloodshed caused protest rallies to spread to other parts of Hazara Division (*Daily Times* [Lahore] April 13). While opponents of the name change continued with their protest rallies and “shutter-down” strikes, two different movements emerged, one of which is for a separate province led by Hindko-speaking politicians, while people from non-Hindko speaking areas of the Battagram and Kohistan districts of Hazara Division and the Kala Dhaka region of Mansehra district teamed up to work for a separate administrative division. All of this is happening amidst reports of a major anti-Taliban military operation in the Kala Dhaka region of Hazara, where some top Taliban leaders were arrested recently by security agencies (*The News*, Islamabad, April 10)

Strategic Importance of the Hazara Division

The strategically located Hazara Division consists of five districts: Haripur, Abbottabad, Mansehra, Battagram

and Kohistan. In the south, it borders the Islamabad Capital Territory, while in the north it borders the Federally Administrated Northern Area (FANA) of Gilgit-Baltistan, next to China’s Xinjiang province and the Wakhan pan-handle of Afghanistan. It is very close to Tajikistan as well. Hazara borders Pakistani-held Kashmir on its east side, with Kashmir’s capital of Muzaffar Abad less than 40 km from Mansehra. On the western side of the Indus are the districts of Shangla, Buner and Swabi. Hazara Division also borders the biggest hydro-electric dam in Pakistan at Tarbela, while Kakul Military Academy, the premier training institute of the Pakistan Army, is also in Hazara. About 500 km of the strategic Karakoram Highway (KKH) pass through Hazara Division.

Hindko is the main language spoken in parts of Hazara like Haripur, Abbottabad and Mansehra. Pashto is the major language in Battagram while Kohistani is the main language in Kohistan district. Pashto is also spoken in the Kala Dhaka and Baffa areas of Mansehra and pockets of Haripur districts. Most of the people who speak Hindko are actually Pashtun by ethnicity. The local Jadoon, Tareen, Mashwani, Swati, Tahirkheli and Dilazak tribes are all Afghan by origin but speak Hindko (*The News*, March 30)

The Hazarwal identity (Hazarwal meaning “one who belongs to Hazara”) is associated with simmering feelings of deprivation and alienation. One reason is the feeling of being a minority in the dominantly Pashto-speaking province. People of Hazara also feel alienated from the provincial capital of Peshawar because of the long distance from Hazara to that city and the fact that the main route from Hazara to Peshawar passes through another province. Because of greater proximity and easier access, the people of Hazara have more interaction with Islamabad and Punjab than Peshawar. However, Punjab considers the Hazarwal as residents of a Pashtun province, while in Peshawar they are not accepted as Pashtuns (*The News*, April, 17).

These feelings of deprivation and alienation came to the surface when Pakistan’s National Assembly accepted the longstanding demand of local Pashtuns to give a name to their province that would represent the Pashtun majority and replace the colonial-era “North-West Frontier Province.” To score political points, the PML-Q aroused people’s emotions against the new name, which resulted in bloodshed. The killings and injuries of protesters fueled local anger and the PML-Q skillfully turned the mood against the Pashtuns (*Daily*

Times, April 14). This raised ethnic tensions in the region and in the province. After the new name for the province was accepted, the anti-name change groups diverted their attention to the demand for a new Hazara province.

Strong Militant Connections

Although Hazara is considered to be a peaceful region distinct from the volatile tribal areas along the Afghan border, underneath this tranquil facade is a long record of serving as a base and training camp for Kashmiri militant groups. Long before the events of 9/11 and Pakistan's emergence as a front line state in the war on terror, several Kashmiri militant groups ran training camps in the Batrassi forests of Mansehra (*Daily Times*, August 29, 2005). According to local journalists, there were about eight training camps run by different Kashmiri militant organizations. After 9/11, when Pakistan became an ally with the United States in the war on terror, then-military ruler General Pervez Musharraf clamped down on local militant groups operating in Kashmir, leading to the closure of the training camps in Mansehra district. The later peace process between Pakistan and India in 2004 is also credited as a major reason for closing down these camps. However, all these steps proved an eye-wash when many of the activists of the banned militant groups were seen back in their camps in July 2005 (*Monthly Herald* [Karachi], July 2005). One manifestation of the presence of a strong jihadi infrastructure in the area was seen in the devastating earthquake of October 2005, when hundreds of activists belonging to the banned militant groups were the first to respond to the disaster. Though their services were lauded by many, especially locals, serious apprehensions were also expressed by others because of the possibility these groups could use the goodwill they created to recruit new militants. [1]

Militants have also attacked NGOs working in the region from time to time, as well as sending threatening letters to their workers. On March 10, militants attacked the Mansehra office of World Vision, a U.S.-based NGO, leaving six people dead (*Daily Times*, March 10). Similarly, a daring attack on the office of Plan International—a U.K.-based charity organization dedicated to helping children—left four of its workers dead and others injured in February 2008. That attack led many international NGOs working for the rehabilitation of victims of the October 2008 earthquake victims to shut down their operations in the region (*Daily Times*, March 20, 2008).

As the Taliban attempt to expand their war from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) to the settled areas, they have tried to increase their presence in the Kohistan and Battagram districts and Kala Dhaka area of Hazara Division. Obviously the Taliban want to exploit the jihadi infrastructure already on the ground in the region, but more important for them is the immense geostrategic significance of the Karakorum Highway that connects Pakistan with China (*Dawn* [Karachi], April 29, 2009). The Kohistan district of Hazara has connections with the Tanzeem Nifaz-i-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM) movement led by radical cleric Maulana Sufi Mohammad. It's worth mentioning here that last year's controversial peace deal between the government and the Taliban for implementing Shari'a in the Swat valley also covered Kohistan district.

It was widely feared that many Taliban militants had fled to Hazara Division after the successful military operation in Swat valley last year. Officials have recently hinted that Kala Dhaka could be a new base for those Taliban militants fleeing South Waziristan and other tribal areas. Last month, five Swat Taliban fighters, including a top commander, were killed in an encounter with police in the Palas area of Kohistan district (*The News*, March 18). Interior Minister Rahman Malik recently told parliament that 10 to 15 groups were operating in Kala Dhaka, comprised of already proclaimed offenders as well as terrorists who escaped the Swat, Malakand and Waziristan operations (*The Nation*, April 19). Security forces recovered a huge cache of arms, rocket launchers and suicide jackets from the hideout of a Taliban commander in a recent operation in the Kala Dhaka area. As with military operations in the tribal regions, religious parties have opposed this fresh military offensive in the Kala Dhaka region (*Dawn*, March 28).

Local political dynamics make the Hazara region vulnerable to Talibanization. Traditionally, this area has been a stronghold of right-wing conservative political parties who have either a soft spot for the Taliban or openly support them. Progressive parties like the Pakistan People's Party and the Awami National Party (currently ruling the Khyber Pashtunkhwa province), have not yet made strong inroads in the Hazara Division. In the last general election of 2008, 17 out of 26 national and provincial seats went to the right wing parties in Hazara Division. More recently, the pro-Taliban Jamiat Ulema-e Islam Fazal-ur-Rehman (JUI-F) grabbed a national assembly seat in a by-election.

Serious Security Ramifications

The prevailing unrest over the name change issue has posed new challenges to the Pakistani government in a region already badly hit by the war on terror. Some political forces have exploited the renaming issue for their own political interests by supporting demands for a Hazara province; giving in on this issue will inevitably fuel existing demands elsewhere in Pakistan for new provinces. These are difficult challenges for a government already shattered by unabated waves of Taliban attacks and issues like power shortages and inflation. After dismantling Taliban bases in some areas of the tribal region, the Hazara region could be an ideal place for displaced militants to exploit the prevailing political unrest, and entrench themselves deep in the region's thick forests, creating another security nightmare for the struggling Pakistani government. If the Taliban are able to consolidate in the Hazara Division, they would be in a position to block the KKH or create security problems that could sever the only land-link between Pakistan and China (see *Terrorism Monitor*, May 18, 2009). The Taliban could also attack or bomb the country's prestigious Military Academy at Kakul as well as target the Tarbela Dam—the country's biggest power facility. If unchecked, the Taliban's growing presence in the region will have serious repercussions unless the political parties realize the gravity of the situation and stop exploiting the name change issue for their own political interests. It is equally important for the ruling parties to take the people of Hazara into their confidence by listening to their grievances while keeping the province intact (*The News*, April 6).

Tayyab Ali Shah is a political analyst and commentator with a post-graduate education in Political Science and public policy.

Notes:

1. The geographical Hazara Division is not to be confused with the Hazara ethnic group of Afghanistan, which is largely Shi'a in faith.
2. Telephone interview with Imtiaz Ali, a Pakistani journalist and analyst, April 22, 2010.