

MILITANT LEADERSHIP MONITOR

Personalities Behind the Insurgency

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NEW AQ LEADER IN PAKISTAN TAKES COMMAND AS ATTACKS ON NATO CONVOYS CONTINUE

On July 18, 2012, a bomb exploded in a fuel tanker after which insurgents opened fire on a convoy NATO supply trucks in Samangan, northern Afghanistan (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEV-FMBBUPg>). In total, 22 vehicles loaded with fuel and goods bound for the coalition forces in Afghanistan were destroyed. Taliban spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid said, "We put explosives on a fuel tanker. When it exploded, we fired on the trucks" (AP [Kabul], July 18).

This was the first major attack on a NATO convoy in the region since Farman Ali Shinwari took over the leadership of al-Qaida operations in Pakistan. Though the attack took place in Afghanistan, an official in Afghanistan suggested that Shinwari played a role in planning and coordinating the attack (Examiner.com, July 19). The attack is outside of Shinwari's previous area of operations in the Khyber Agency of Pakistan, but he may have expanded his area of operations since his promotion.



FARC's new leader, Timochenko

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Shinwari was named al-Qaida leader in Pakistan on April 30, 2012 nearly four months after his predecessor, Badr Mansour, was killed in a U.S. drone strike in Miran Shah, Pakistan (http://ia_archiver-web.archive.org/details/badrmansour_assahab). Shinwari belongs to the Khugakel clan of the Shinwari tribe based in the Landikotal sub-district of Khyber Agency. He has five brothers who are all affiliated to the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Kashmir-based militant groups. Shinwari's familiarity with Khyber Agency makes him an attractive leader for al-Qaida and the TTP since 70% of the supplies that sustain the NATO alliance in its battle against the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan transit through the Khyber Pass.

Farman Ali Shinwari also leads the Abdullah Azzam Shaheed Brigades, which is an independent military unit that operates under the TTP and focuses on attacking NATO convoys in Khyber Agency (Phone Interview [Khyber Agency], June 22). In the 1990s he was a fighter in Kashmir with Maulana Fazlur Rehman Khalil's Kashmir-based Harkat-ul-Mujahideen. He is only 30 years old and has a Bachelors of Science degree in Chemistry and Biology and a first-division Masters degree in International Relations from the University of Peshawar. In addition, he is fluent in English, Internet-savvy, and reportedly an "eloquent speaker on issues of jihad" (The Tribune [Islamabad], April 30). If attacks on NATO convoys continue to escalate, his leadership promotion could be credited as one of the major factors.

FORMER ADVISER TO OSAMA BIN LADEN FREED IN MAURITANIA

Abu Hafs al-Mauritani, also known as al-Qaida's "Mr. Theology", was released from prison in Mauritania in early July. A veteran of the Soviet war in Afghanistan, he is best known for his role advising Osama bin Laden on religious and strategic matters in the years before September 11, 2011. He personally taught bin Laden Islamic jurisprudence and drafted *fatwas* for al-Qaida (Magharebia, April 12). After the Taliban lost control of Afghanistan in late 2001, Abu Hafs relocated to Iran where he remained under house arrest until he was extradited to Mauritania in April 2012. Now he is fully free for the first time in eleven years.

Despite his closeness to bin Laden, he was, according to the 9/11 Commission, one of the few high-ranking al-Qaida leaders who opposed the September 2011

attacks on the United States. He reportedly refused to issue a *fatwa* supporting the attacks (Magharebia, April 12). However, after September 11, he changed course and expressed agreement with the attacks, although he never admitted to al-Qaida's role in the attacks.

His most notable contribution to al-Qaida was his recommendation to bin Laden that al-Qaida merge with Ayman al-Zawahiri's Islamic Jihad (Telegraph, July 10). He therefore helped form the leadership core of al-Qaida that existed for the greater part of the last decade. Before September 11, 2001, he played an important role in recruiting new members to al-Qaida. His position as the head of Islamic Studies at the University of Kandahar placed him in an environment where he was surrounded by many young religious students.

The conditions of Abu Hafs' release are still unclear, but he is one of the few remaining al-Qaida leaders who is alive and free and who has the legitimacy of having been directly connected to bin Laden. How he chooses to use this legitimacy could have an impact on militant ideology in the years to come. Although he has reportedly denounced al-Qaida as a condition of his release, online jihadist forums have uniformly congratulated his release.

Tajikistan's New Most Wanted: A Profile of Warlord and Narco-Trafficker Tolib Ayombekov

Igor Rotar

On July 24, Tajikistan's government launched an operation against an illegal armed group. The special operation was initiated in reaction to the incident on July 21 when regional security chief General Abdullo Nazarov was pulled from his car, allegedly by rebel fighters, and stabbed to death as he was returning to Khorog from the Ishkashim area to the South (*al-Jazeera*, July 25, 2012). Tajik government helicopter gunships were strafing Khorog, the capital of the Gorno-Badakhshan autonomy (southeast Tajikistan). Twelve government personnel were killed and twenty-three injured in the day's fighting, according to officials. Government forces detained 40 rebels, including eight Afghan citizens, and killed 30 others, he said, adding that there have been no civilian casualties (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, July 26).

Officials blamed the killing of General Nazarov on Tolib Ayombekov, another former rebel supporter who is now Ishkashim's border-police commander. (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, July 25).

Background

The Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province is a special region of Tajikistan. Located in the Pamir Mountains, it makes up 45 percent of the land area of the country but only 3 percent (218,000) of the population (Population of the Republic of Tajikistan as of 1 January 2008, State Statistical Committee, Dushanbe, 2008). Pamir ethnic groups essentially differ from Tajiks. There are several dialects of the Pamir language and almost all Pamir people adhere to the Ismaili sect of Shia Islam. Pamiri people are not strong believers. There are no Islamic radicals among them. The Pamiris have close linguistic, cultural and religious ties with the people in the Badakhshan Province of Afghanistan.

During the civil war in Tajikistan (1992-97), the Pamiris supported the opposition. But due to the remoteness and inaccessibility of the Pamirs (the region is connected with other parts of Tajikistan by only one road), the government troops could not reach Gorno-Badakhshan. So, this war is the first conflict to occur in Pamirs in the post-Soviet era.

Many Tajik experts are of the opinion that the murder of General Nazarov is not politically motivated but is clearly a criminal case. Moreover, these experts believe that Abdullo Nazarov and Tolib Ayombekov actually were competitors in drug smuggling. (Fergananeews.com, July 25). However, there is a danger that this criminal conflict might transform into an interregional confrontation. General Abdullo Nazarov was a Sunni Muslim from the Khatlon province in southern Tajikistan and Tolib is a Pamir Ismaili.

Tolib Ayombekov

Tolib was little-known in Tajikistan before the murder of General Nazarov. Tolib is 47 years old. He had four sons and one daughter. One of his sons was killed during the fighting in Gorno-Badakhshan during the civil war in Tajikistan (1992-1997). Tolib was a field commander of the Tajik opposition but there is no information about his participating in any battle during the civil war.

Tolib was better known as the younger brother of a famous Pamir warlord and drug-dealer, Abdumalon Ayombekov, alias Alyosha the Hunchback. In 1993,

Pamir fighters elected Abdumalon as the self-defense force commander of Pamir. De-facto, Abdumalon became the leader of Gorno-Badakhshan. The author first met Abdumalon in 1993 when he covered the Tajik civil war. Abdumalon's height was not more than 160 cm, and on his back, one could see a huge hump. It was quite ironic that while this man appeared disabled, all Pamir militants unquestionably obeyed him.

During a private conversation with the author, Abdulamon did not deny his involvement in drug smuggling. He explained that he spent the smuggling money to help Pamiris. "Pamir people would be hungry without my money" he said. He also claimed that his main goal was to prevent government troops consisting of natives from the Kulyab region (Southern Tajikistan) from entering the Pamir. "If Kuliabis invade Pamir, then they will start ethnic cleansing. My task is not to let them do this," Abdulamon told the author.

Abdulamon was killed in 1993 when a mine set by unknown individuals exploded in his office. After the end of the civil war, the Tajik government appointed Tolib as a deputy of the head of the Ishkashim border patrol unit. Tolib got this position only as a result of his brother's influence. According to a source in the Russian newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, the president of Tajikistan allowed Tolib to conduct "free business" (smuggling drugs and tobacco) under the condition that he did not interfere in politics (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, July 24).

A Restive Region

Tolib has denied accusations that he is responsible for the murder of Nazarov and supporters have claimed that the attack was orchestrated by the government. Tension has always existed between the weak government of Tajikistan that lacks popular support, and the isolated Badakhshan Province that has always resisted the control of the central government. At the end of the civil war in 1997 many local militant leaders were given positions in their localities, wielding them political and economic power. The central government has since been working to remove these figures from their positions to regain power.

Corresponding with the existing tension, there has been a constant threat of ethnic cleansing in the Pamir which remains high. As *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* recently noted, Tajik authorities have used Nazarov's murder as an excuse to cleanse the Pamirs of former field-commanders

from the Tajik opposition. According to the newspaper, the rumors that one may expect a special operation in Pamir against the remaining so-called opposition groups (the participants of the fight against the government during the civil war, 1992-1997), appeared on July 3, when the Defense Ministry of Tajikistan started military exercises “Hafiz-2012 in a neighborhood of Khorog (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, July 25).

Since the Pamir is connected with the other regions of Tajikistan only by one road passing through the remote, hard-to-reach, mountainous region, Pamir fighters can easily block it and cut off the region from Tajikistan. The situation is also complicated by the fact that the militants may hope for the help from Afghan Islamists. According to the Ferghana news agency, now on the Afghan side of the mountain Badakhshan, one may watch groups of about 200 fighters who are ready to help their co-religionists in the Tajik Pamir (*Ferghananews.com*, July 25).

Many experts on Tajikistan do not believe that a real large-scale war will begin in Pamir. “Most panic articles about the situation in Pamir were published by Russian media,” a famous Tajik political scientist and journalist Hairullo Mirsaidov told EDM on July 25. “Now, the Kremlin and Dushanbe are discussing the future of Russian military bases in Tajikistan and for Moscow, it is profitable to make Emomali Rahmon scared. The president of Tajikistan is planning to visit Khorog in August. He will take a lot of money and gifts. He will be able to make an agreement with the Pamir elite, and as to small military groups, they will be destroyed without a hesitation.”

Analyst Igor Rotar often writes for Jamestown Foundation’s Eurasia Daily Monitor. He has previously written for Nezavisimaya Gazeta, Komsomol’skaia Pravda, Izvestia, Rossia, Novie Izvestia, as well as the Forum 18 News Service..

The Reemergence of AQAP Operative Mish‘al Muhammad al-Shadawkhi

Michael Ryan

A telephone conversation between the Saudi Ambassador to Yemen, Ali Hamdan, and an al-Qaeda operative last April gave a rare glimpse into the shadow war between al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The al-Qaeda operative, Mish‘al Muhammad al-Shadawkhi took responsibility for kidnapping the Saudi Vice Consul, Abdullah al-Khalidi on March 28 in Yemen on behalf of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). A Yemeni security official stated, a group of armed men kidnapped al-Khalidi “while he was coming out of his home in the Mansoura district in Aden” (*Xinhua English website*, March 28). A source at the Saudi consulate in Aden added that armed men had robbed al-Khalidi two months earlier in the same place. Another police official stated that the kidnapping was not politically motivated, rather “he has some personal conflicts with people in Aden.” This official added that al-Khalidi had been threatened and someone had “thrown a grenade at his home” (*Al Jazeera*, March 28). Kidnapping victims in Yemen are often released unharmed. When Yemeni tribesmen carry out such kidnappings, they generally ask for ransom or some concession from the central government. In this case, some in Yemen speculated, that if al-Khalidi had an intelligence role in targeting tribesman for attacks, he would probably be killed.

Al-Shadawkhi’s call indicated that the Saudi diplomat was in good shape as two videos of al-Khalidi afterwards confirmed. Southern Yemeni tribal leaders quickly became involved in the negotiations for the release of the Saudi diplomat and by the last week in April began to predict his imminent release. Intensified fighting in neighboring Abyan province between the central government and forces allied to al-Qaeda quelled these predictions, but tribal negotiations with al-Qaeda’s new face in South Yemen, Ansar al-Shari‘ah, continued (*Yemen Observer*, June 13). A source close to Ansar al-Shari‘ah indicated that the diplomat might have been moved to a more secure location in Shabwah Province.

Who Is Mish‘al Muhammad Al-Shadawkhi?

Al-Shadawkhi, nicknamed “Anis,” was born in

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on January 19, 1982. [1] In his phone conversation, however, he identified his home as the al-Qassim Province, which is perhaps the most conservative province in the kingdom. On May 31, 2001, like many Saudi youth, he went on jihad to Afghanistan via the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan. Unlike the vast majority of young Saudi men who travelled to Afghanistan, however, he appears to have been inducted into al-Qaeda almost immediately and given training in the infamous Farouq camp. He would likely have been exposed to some of the most radical Saudi Arabian members of al-Qaeda, who would soon return to the kingdom where they would engage in Jihadist insurgency starting in 2003.

Al-Shadawkhi did not go with his al-Qaeda comrades to Saudi Arabia. After fighting alongside the Taliban, he surrendered to the Northern Alliance, who transferred him to American forces. He entered Guantanamo on January 20, 2002. Little is known about him from American public records. He would seem to have been of little intelligence value and judged not to be a significant threat, as he was among the earliest prisoners released to Saudi Arabia on May 14, 2003. Anonymous leaks, however, indicated that officials at the Pentagon, the Central Intelligence Agency and the Justice Department questioned, whether some unnamed “detainees were too dangerous to send back and whether the United States could trust Saudi promises to keep the men imprisoned.” Al-Shadawkhi arrived home a few days after al-Qaeda’s insurgency in the kingdom had begun in earnest. [2]

The Saudi government tried and sentenced al-Shadawkhi, whereupon he entered a prison rehabilitation program in which authoritative Muslim scholars expose candidates to a critique of their Jihadist ideology. The Saudi government offers incentives to those it considers rehabilitated, such as jobs, cash awards, and arranged marriages to reintegrate the former militants into Saudi society. Al-Shadawkhi convinced the Saudi authorities that he had reformed. He was released from prison, obtained a job in a local school, acted as imam in a mosque, was married and started a family. As a condition of his release, Al-Shadawkhi was not allowed to associate with former militant colleagues nor leave the country. At the end of the first semester of 2009, he told his family that he intended to go on a religious pilgrimage (*umrah*) to Mecca. Instead, he joined 10 other al-Qaeda members in a well-coordinated escape to Yemen, which came at a time when the al-Qaeda leadership had decided to re-establish AQAP there.

When the Saudi authorities issued their 85 most wanted list in 2009, al-Shadawkhi was listed as number 60.

The Telephone Call

Mish‘al al-Shadawkhi appears somewhat unsophisticated in the recorded conversation with the Saudi Ambassador. [3] For example, when al-Shadawkhi asks for the release of prisoners in Saudi Arabia and their transfer to al-Qaeda in Yemen, the ambassador responds, “What if they do not want to go to Yemen?” Al-Shadawkhi dismissively tells him “we can discuss that later.” He also makes it clear that he is speaking on behalf of the leader of AQAP Nasir al-Wuhayshi, not himself, when he repeats several sweeping demands for the release of all prisoners, Saudi or Yemeni, currently held by Saudi intelligence and warns that those who hold al-Khalidi have been “preparing the knife.” Al-Shadawkhi names several priority female prisoners, including Heila al-Qusayyer, whom Saudi authorities arrested in 2010 for providing assistance to al-Qaeda. The priority male prisoners include Jihadist ideologues, who are not al-Qaeda members, such as Faris al-Zahrani (MLM 6/30/2011) and Nasir al-Fahd (TM, 12/22/2010). It is clear that al-Shadawkhi is nothing more than a messenger as he cannot give any idea how much ransom is being demanded.

Conclusion

Mish‘al al-Shadawkhi is a minor actor in a large play involving powerful Yemeni tribal forces, the central government of Yemen, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Jihadist forces in both countries that operate under the general banner of al-Qaeda. The kingdom has vital security interests in preventing Yemen from become a failed state. It must balance its relationship with the central government and its relationship with the tribes. It is important that while the Saudi government refused to negotiate with al-Qaeda, it has admitted numerous contacts with tribal representatives, who claim to be in contact with al-Qaeda. Mish‘al Al-Shadawkhi’s call began this process and moved responsibility for the kidnapping away from the tribes. The fate of the Saudi Diplomat, however, will likely be determined by the success of negotiations with tribal leaders. The only likely concession in play is money; al-Shadawkhi will move back into the shadows.

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Deep Battle: Decoding Al-Qaeda's Strategy Against America will be published by Columbia University Press.

Notes:

1] "Mish'al Has Spent 11 Years on the Deviant Path," by Mansur Al-Khamis, in *Al-Watan Online* (in Arabic), April 19, 2012. Variant spellings of his name in English include Al-Shedoky, al-Shedocky, and Ashadouki. His birthday is given as January 1, 1882 in Western sources.

2] "The Reach of War: Detainees; Officials Detail a Detainee Deal by 3 Countries," by Don Van Natta Jr. and Tim Golden, in *The New York Times*, July 4, 2004. Oddly, the only official information we have about, al-Shadowkhi's stay at Guantanamo is a mug shot, his serial number 71, birth date, the record of his height (5'10") and weight (130 lbs.) at arrival and his weight at release (149 lbs.).

3] For the conversation, see *Sada al-Ma'a* website (Arabic): <http://www.sadaalma.com.sa/news-action-show-id-8798.htm>

The Elusive Terror Mastermind of the Indian Mujahideen: A Profile of Ahmed Siddibaba a.k.a Yasin Bhatkal

Animesh Roul

For over a year, India has been struggling to recuperate from the November 2008 terrorist attacks on the commercial capital Mumbai. In February 2010, the lull was interrupted by a bomb blast masterminded and executed by Ahmed Zarar Siddibaba, a top ranking Indian Mujahideen (IM) operative, which killed nearly 17 people and left over 50 injured. The attack marked the reemergence of a revived and regrouped IM.

Ahmed Siddibaba, also known as Yasin Bhatkal, notorious for his various aliases such as 'Saharukh Khan', 'Sivanand', and 'Dr. Imran', is believed to be in charge of the IM terror group since the top leaders of the homegrown terror group have fled to Pakistan and to the Gulf region following countrywide crackdowns. For the first time, Yasin, the IM's explosive expert, who facilitated terror acts but typically remained in the background, stepped into the limelight during

investigations into a series of blasts that hit major urban centers such as Delhi, Bangalore, and Ahmadabad in 2008. He was identified by two arrested IM operatives, Mohammed Saif and Akbar Ismail Chaudhary, who revealed Yasin's bomb-making expertise to their interrogators as well as his alliance with two fugitive IM founders. [1]

Various interrogation accounts confirmed Yasin's role in at least five major terror events in India since early 2010, including Pune's Germany Bakery blast (February 13, 2010) and the serial blasts in Mumbai (July 13, 2011). According to Delhi police investigations, Yasin along with a Pakistani national Muhammad Adil and Indian Mujahideen militant Qateel Siddiqui, who were both arrested in May last year, carried out the terror strike outside Jama Masjid, ahead of the 2010 Commonwealth Games to avenge the Batla House encounter. [2] The probe is ongoing to find Yasin's role in the Delhi High Court blasts that occurred on May 25 and September 7, 2011.

Yasin was born on January 15, 1983, in the port town of Bhatkal in the Uttar Kannada district in Karnataka, according to the Interpol/Central Bureau of investigation watch list. [3] As per his mother Rehana and other relatives' account, Yasin had been involved in his father's garment business in Dubai. He left the business due to differences with his father over his radical world view (*Indian Express*, January 24, 2012).

In early December last year, Delhi police has announced a cash reward of INR 15 lakh (\$26,730) for any information on Yasin Bhatkal which leads to his arrest. Earlier to that Yasin managed to escape arrest during raids in Delhi and Chennai, Tamil Nadu, and continues to evade arrest. [4]

If intelligence agencies are to be believed, Yasin Bhatkal invested funds meant for Jihadi causes in the realty sector. He reportedly invested Rs 14 lakh (\$25,000) in a project under construction in Nalasopara, Mumbai. It is not clear however whether he invested the money to generate funds for future terror activities or to nurse his own ambition to get rich (Times of India, Jul 16, 2012). One IM operatives who has been arrested, identified as Kamal Hassan, belongs to the Bihar chapter of IM. Hassan confessed to have met Yasin early this year in New Delhi. According to the detained operative, Yasin is on a recruitment drive across the country, looking to float smaller groups who can help him garner a supply of fake Indian currency notes and commit other subversive

activities around the country. Yasin was arrested once in a fake currency case by the West Bengal police, but they did not recognize him as IM's chief and eventually set him free (*Mumbai Mirror*, February 05, 2012).

India's Intelligence Bureau (IB) believes that one Fasih Mehmood, who is now in Saudi Arabia's custody for his IM links, was closely associated with Yasin back in India (*Asian Age*, Jul 17, 2012). As part of the Bihar chapter of IM, both Fasih and Yasin masterminded the bomb blast at the Chinnaswamy Stadium and the shooting of Taiwanese tourists at Jama Masjid, Delhi in 2011. IB also suspects that Fasih had been in constant touch with Yasin from Saudi Arabia and arranged funds for the IM's activities in India (Daily News and Analysis, July 11, 2012).

Over the past couple of years, India's intelligence agencies have tracked down the IM's different State chapters, especially in Bihar, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi. It was learnt from the interrogation reports that in the aftermath of Batla House encounter (Sep 2008), Yasin was asked by his Pakistan-based mentors and fugitive IM leaders to exploit the Bihar chapter for reengaging the already indoctrinated IM foot soldiers there for subversive activities. While in charge of the Bihar chapter (which includes the Samastipur, Darbhanga and Nalanda areas) which is considered to be the oldest of IM's chapters, Yasin indoctrinated many youths with his pro-Jihadi sermons, distributing Jihadi literatures and audio visual files on mobile phones that revealed atrocities committed against Muslims in the country (e.g. Gujarat riots of 2002) and around the world (e.g. Iraq). Yasin Bhatkal also worked with other IM operatives like Tehseen Akhtar Sheikh and Naqi Ahmed Sheikh to influence and indoctrinate youths for revenge against Indian State.

Conclusion

The bigger question that remains before the security agencies is the whereabouts of Yasin. It is still unclear whether he fled to Karachi, Pakistan or the Gulf states. Many believe that the elusive IM mastermind is still in the country and planning to perpetrate the next big strike. The latest information on his location comes from none other than Lashkar-e-Taiba's (LeT) Syed Zabihuddin Ansari (a.k.a Abu Jundal). According to Ansari who was in touch with the IM leadership in Karachi and in India, Yasin has fled to Bangladesh with the support of the Pakistan intelligence agency, ISI and is presently hiding there (*Deccan Chronicle*, July 21,

2012). To note, Ansari also took the Bangladesh route to Pakistan after the 2006 Aurangabad arms haul case.

As the investigation into the IM's secret, multi-layered, pan-India network widens, Yasin's role as chief of the group is becoming authenticated. It is evident now that he donned many hats for the IM, ranging from motivator, recruiter, bomb-maker, logistic provider to making target surveillance and selection, and is responsible for the IM's revival. Arguably, Yasin has placed himself as number three in the IM's hierarchy following Riyaz Shahbandri and Iqbal Shahbandri who are both known for vital roles in reinvigorating Indian Mujahideen as a deadly homegrown terror entity.

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Notes:

- 1] "After Bhatkal brothers, Yasin could be IM's top man for operations," *Indian Express*, December 01, 2011.
- 2] An encounter between Delhi police and IM terrorists took place in Batla House area in Delhi's Jamia Nagar on 19 Sept 2008, a week after the serial blasts in the National capital. Two IM operatives identified as Atif Amin and Mohamed Sajid were killed and two others were arrested in the encounter. Further investigations led to arrest of many local Muslim youths which caused widespread resentment within the community and civil society groups. However, the government has confirmed that the encounter was genuine and ruled out reopening of the case in any court of law. IM terrorists have carried out a shoot out at the historic Jama masjid on the two year anniversary of the encounter, injuring two Taiwanese tourists. See, "Batla House encounter: NHRC gives clean chit to Delhi police", Times of India/PTI, Jul 22, 2009; Batla House encounter genuine, no further probe: P Chidambaram, Times of India, January 13, 2012.
- 3] For a brief biography of Yasin Bhatkal, see the 'Wanted' page listing of Central Bureau of Investigation at <<http://www.cbi.nic.in/rnotice/A-7752-12-2011.html>>
- 4] A reward of INR 3 lakh was announced in April 2011. However, it was increased to INR 15 lakh subsequently by Delhi police following the interrogation of six IM operatives arrested from different parts of the country. See, "Rs 15 lakh reward for catching elusive IM operative," *Indian Express*, December 01, 2011; "Yasin Bhatkal gave slip to cops twice last week", *Asian Age*, December 2, 2011.

A Post-Mortem Analysis of Afghanistan's Second Most Powerful Uzbek Warlord Ahmed Khan "Samangani"

Brian Glyn Williams

On July 14, a key Uzbek power broker in the plains of northern Afghanistan, Ahmed Khan Samangani, was killed by a suicide bomber who embraced him while accepting guests at his daughter's wedding in the town of Aibek, capital of the strategic province of Samangan. In addition to Khan, 22 others were also killed in the explosion, among them many important regional figures including Muhammad Khan, the provincial head of the National Directorate of Security, Saeed Ahmed Sameh, the police commander for western Afghanistan, and Muhammadullah the head of training for the Afghan National Army in Balkh Province. An MP from the neighboring province of Balkh, Eshaq Rahgozar, was also wounded in the attack, as was the former Sar-e Pul Province governor, Sayed Iqbal Munib. Balkh's governor, *Ustad* (Teacher) Atta Muhammad Nur, was apparently on the way to the wedding, but arrived late and was thus spared.

This was the greatest single blow against members of the northern opposition to the Taliban since the bombing of a sugar factory in neighboring Baghlan Province in 2007, which killed six members of parliament. It comes on the heels of the May 2011 suicide bombing assassination of General Mohammad Daoud Daoud, the police chief for northern Afghanistan and a key Tajik commander in the Northern Alliance opposition to the Taliban. It also follows a failed attempt to kill the most prominent Uzbek leader in the north, General Abdul Rashid Dostum, with a suicide bombing in 2005. [1] The Taliban however, has denied responsibility for the attack on Ahmed Khan. Such a denial does not necessarily mean they did not carry it out; this is a tactic they have used in the past to avoid criticism when numerous civilians have died in a bombing.

The violent attack that killed and wounded many prominent officials in the comparatively quiet province of Samangan is indication that the Taliban is moving in to this Uzbek-dominated area. The province is strategically valuable because it is traversed by the A-76 highway which links Kabul to the capital of the north, Mazar i

Sharif, and the Uzbekistani border city of Termez. This highway, known as the Northern Distribution Network, has served as the major conduit for NATO supplies since the closing of the Pakistani supply route last year, which has since been reopened in early July. As if to confirm their presence in Samagan, just four days after the initial attack, on July 18, a Taliban bomb destroyed 22 NATO supply trucks parked in Aibek (*Tribune*, July 18, 2012).

But it was clearly the killing of Ahmed Khan that was the greatest success of the bombing. A history of this powerful figure will demonstrate how important it was for the Taliban to remove him from the scene. Ahmed Khan, who was born in 1957, came from a family of powerful, semi-feudal lords, known as khans, who held considerable territory in Samangan Province. When the Soviets invaded in 1979 Ahmed Khan's father took to the Hindu Kush Mountains of southern Samangan Province and led a large group of Uzbek mujahideen against them. When he was killed, Ahmed Khan took control of the Samangan *sangar* (fighting unit). As there was no Uzbek mujahideen political party, Khan joined the Tajik-dominated Jamaat i Islam party of Massoud the Lion of Panjsher and Burhanuddin Rabbani. At this time, Khan and his mujahideen fought against the most powerful pro-Communist Uzbek figure in the region, General Abdul Rashid Dostum.

When the Communist government fell in 1992 and the jihad devolved into an ethnic struggle for power, Khan abandoned the Jamiaat i Islam and joined Dostum's Uzbek-dominated Jumbesh Party. Khan was granted de facto control of Samangan Province by Dostum who served as the overlord of various Uzbek *jang salars* (warlords) who ruled the plains of northern Afghanistan during the Afghan Civil War of 1992-1998.

In 1998 Dostum and Khan were defeated by the invading Taliban from the south after a series of seesaw battles. Dostum, the pasha (Commander) of the Uzbek opposition, fled the country to exile in Turkey at the time, but Ahmed Khan and his men stayed in the country to fight in an insurgency against the Taliban. As they had done in the 1980s against the Soviets, Khan and his men retreated to the mountains and waged a hit-and-run guerilla campaign against the Taliban in the plains. Khan's base was in the Darya Suf Valley, south of Aibek. From there he and hundreds of his followers struck at Taliban targets across the north and resisted their encroachments into the mountains. In April of 2001 Dostum returned from Turkey to lead the horse-mounted guerilla campaign against the Taliban and

Ahmed Khan served as one of his cavalry commanders. The Taliban enacted a blockade of the mountains to deny Dostum and Khan supplies and their rebellion appeared to be doomed until the fateful day of 9/11.

After 9/11 US Centcom dispatched a 6-man CIA Special Activities Division team known as Alpha and a 12-man Green Beret Team known as Tiger 02 to act as “force magnifier” in enabling the Uzbek resistance to seize territory from the Taliban via close air support. Against all odds, the CIA-Uzbek-Green Beret fighting force of approximately 2,000 men broke out of the Darya Suf Valley and made their way across the plains of the north, defeating a much larger Taliban/Al Qaeda force in the process. Captain Mark Nutsch, the head of the now legendary Green Beret Team ODA 595 aka Tiger 02, described Khan as the “Jeb Stuart of Afghanistan” for his fearlessness in battle. His Samangani troops played a major role in Dostum’s subsequent seizure of the holy shrine town of Mazar i Sharif which led to the collapse of the Taliban army of the north in November 2001.

Following the collapse of the Taliban house of cards in December 2001, Khan returned to Aibek and once again ruled it as an unofficial patrimony. He did so as a member of Dostum’s Jumbesh Party, which vied for control of the north with the Karzai government.

In 2005 I met Khan at Dostum’s compound in Sheberghan, to the west of Mazar i Sharif and traveled with him and his entourage to Aibek. In Aibek, Khan was clearly a native son whom the local Uzbeks saw as their defender vis a vis the Pashtuns and Tajiks and his picture adorned storefronts, cars, and billboards. I found him to be an easy going moderate who had given up war in order to become a member of parliament and defend his people in the Wolesi Jirga (Parliament). He was outspokenly pro-American and feared the gradual infiltration of the Taliban into the north when they departed.

In 2006, however, Khan fell out with Dostum and joined Karzai. In 2007 Khan survived an ambush on his convoy that killed his bodyguard and driver. He blamed the attack not on the Taliban, but on Dostum. Khan publicly denounced Dostum at the time but made peace with him in 2008. During the 2009 presidential elections Ahmed Khan encouraged the Uzbeks of his province to vote for the Tajik candidate Abdullah Abdullah. By this time the Taliban had begun to infiltrate into the neighboring province of Kunduz and Khan’s men joined the battle against them. While Khan’s followers had

been officially disarmed as part of DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration) process, I was told that he and his men secretly cached weapons throughout the province to fight the Taliban in the future. As the United States and NATO forces prepared for the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, local figures like Khan and Dostum were preparing to wage a grass-roots battle to keep them out of their lands. As the most powerful broker in Samangan, Khan was poised to be a major player in developments in the north in a post-Obama troop surge Afghanistan.

This then was the context for Ahmed Khan “Samangani’s” assassination. Khan had consolidated his authority in Samangan and was strategically well placed to wage a localized counter-insurgency war with the Taliban should Afghan central authority weaken in the wake of the US/NATO departure from Afghanistan. His death will certainly lead to a power struggle in Aibek and greater Samangan as the scion of the family that has dominated the region for decades has been killed. If the Taliban is behind the attack, as seems likely, it certainly serves their purpose of weakening the Uzbek anti-Taliban grassroots resistance in Samangan and surrounding regions. It will, however, also have the effect of hardening the Uzbek determination to resist President Karzai’s efforts to reach out to his Taliban “brothers” and bring them into the fold in a post-NATO settlement. Like the Tajiks who have lost Daoud Daoud and former Afghan president and head of the Peace Council, Burhanuddin Rabbani, to Taliban suicide bombers, the Uzbeks are increasingly disinclined to discuss peace with the Taliban whom they consider to be their mortal enemies. Ahmed Khan’s death at the hands of a suicide bomber will only compound this feeling of hatred for the Taliban.

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Note:

1] For more on this bombing and the Taliban campaign against northern leaders see: “Target Dostum. The Campaign Against Northern Alliance Warlords.” Terrorism Monitor. October 21, 2005.

http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=592

The Rebirth of FARC and the Rise of Its New Leader “Timochenko”

Jacob Zenn

After Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) leader Guillermo León Sáenz Vargas (a.k.a. Alfonso Cano) was killed in a bombing raid in Cauca Department, southwest Colombia on November 4, 2011, the seven-member FARC secretariat needed only 11 days to unanimously select Rodrigo Londoño Echeverry (a.k.a. Timoleón Jiménez or Timochenko) as Cano’s replacement (ABP Noticias, November 15, 2011). [1] Timochenko has become the third leader in FARC’s history and has inherited an organization that has lost four members of its ruling secretariat since 2008 and that is currently undergoing what the Colombian army calls a “rebirth.”

The four members of FARC’s secretariat who have died in as many years are Alfonso Cano; FARC founder Pedro Antion Marin (a.k.a. Manuel Marulanda), who died in May 2008 of a cardiac arrest; FARC Eastern bloc commander Victor Julio Suarez Rojas (a.k.a. Mono Joy), who died in a Colombian army bombing raid in Cauca in September 2010; and Luis Edgar Devia Silva (a.k.a. Raul Reyes), a FARC spokesperson who was killed in a bombing raid at a base located one-mile inside Ecuadorean territory in March 2008.

The FARC needed a leader who could provide long-term stability after the period of rapid leadership turnover; hence the selection of Timochenko.

Timochenko’s familiarity with the Colombia-Venezuela border region, where he is now based, provides him with a safe refuge to evade the Colombian army, especially if he is receiving support from the Venezuelan government. According to intelligence gained from the raid of Raul Reyes’ base in Ecuador, Timochenko and his guerillas met Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez in 1998, one year before Chavez became president, and they gave him the alias “Comrade Pedro” (*Colombia Reports*, April 17, 2010). While international boundaries did not stop Colombia from entering Ecuador to eliminate Reyes, Chavez has warned Colombia that a similar attack in Venezuela would be a “cause of war” (Reuters [Caracas], March 1, 2008). One of Chavez’ motivations for supporting the FARC is his fear that if Colombia

and the United States try to overthrow him, he will need to use the FARC as a proxy against Colombia.

Timochenko’s bases in Venezuela are also important for FARC’s “rebirth” strategy, which was initiated under Alfonso Cano (LA Press [Colombia], April 21). FARC now engages in small-scale, ambush-style attacks targeting Colombia’s military personnel and infrastructure since the 8,000 to 12,000-fighter FARC is no match for the Colombian army in direct confrontation. This strategy is centered in Nariño, Cauca, Putumayo and Caquetá in southwest Colombia, where Cano had been in hiding, and in the northeastern departments of Magdalena Medio, Catatumbo and Arauca, which border Venezuela and are near Timochenko’s bases.

Influence of La Violencia

Timochenko was born in 1959 to a peasant family in the department of Quindio in west-central Colombia. It is a coffee-growing region that was at the center of *La Violencia*, a period of Civil War in the 1940s and 1950s between Colombia’s liberal and conservative parties in which more than 300,000 people were killed. After *La Violencia*, the guerilla units of the liberal party-allied Colombian Communist Party (PCC) formed the FARC. The guerillas maintained guerilla warfare as their model for seizing national power and abandoned the model of “self-defense” that had characterized other PCC units during *La Violencia*.

Thus, in Timochenko’s youth in the 1960s and 1970s, he experienced the genesis of the FARC insurgency. Like the original FARC fighters he has always supported offensive warfare over tactics that can be perceived as defensive, including negotiations. This has implications for his leadership today. Alfonso Cano was a political representative for the FARC in the 1991 Caracas peace negotiations and in the 1992 Tlaxcala Peace Dialogues and current FARC second-in-command Luciano Marin Arango (a.k.a. Ivan Marquez) has represented FARC in prisoner swap negotiations. They were both open to a political solution with the government, but Timochenko is known only for his military reputation and his representation of FARC’s hard-line faction— not for diplomacy.

Accordingly, in Timochenko’s first letter to Colombian President Manuel Santos after becoming commander, on November 20, 2011, he expressed no interest in political reconciliation. He said, “We all have to die, Santos, every one of us.... Nobody is going to escape

that fact.... Some for one cause, and others for another” (AFP [Bogota], November 20, 2011).

In a January 2012 press release, however, Timochenko’s tone was less hostile than in November 2011 and even considered “flowery” in local news reports. Some analysts in Colombia believe that Timochenko realizes the FARC’s position of weakness in relation to the government, which has forced him to change his stance on negotiations. Timochenko said in the press release that, “We are interested in trying a hypothetical negotiation table. In front of the country. Questioning the privatizations, the deregulation, the absolute freedom of trade and investment, the environmental degradation, market democracy, the military doctrine.” Timochenko indicated he would follow Cano’s policy and be willing to “resume the agenda that was left hanging in El Caguan,” where the rebels and government held peace failed talks between 1999 and 2002 (*Prensarural*, January 13; *El Tiempo*, January 9).

30 Years in the FARC

Timochenko joined the FARC in 1982 at the age of 23 after receiving a medical degree and fought with the FARC’s 9th Front in the department of Antioquia. Sometime after joining the FARC, Timochenko is believed to have trained in politics and warfare in the Soviet Union and Cuba where he received his nom de guerre “Timochenko” in honor of Semyon Konstantinovich Timoshenko, a Ukrainian General in the Red Army during World War II (*LA Press*, January 21). When Timochenko returned to Colombia, he became a protégé of FARC founder Manuel Marulanda and earned the loyalty of FARC’s top leaders during battles in Antioquia against the government-sponsored right-wing paramilitary units of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). Timochenko was so close to Marulanda that one of Timochenko’s only ever public appearances was in 2008 when the FARC taped a video of his speech announcing Marulanda’s death. [1]

Timochenko rose quickly in the FARC’s ranks and in 1986 he became the fifth member of the FARC’s seven-member Secretariat. In 1988, he became the head of the Eastern bloc of the FARC and was assigned to the FARC’s Magdalena Medio bloc in northeastern Colombia on the border with Venezuela where the fiercest battles between FARC fighters and the AUC were taking place. Timochenko was also given command of FARC’s intelligence and counter-intelligence apparatus to coordinate FARC’s spies in the government (Dinero.

com, November 17, 2011). In 1990, he became aware of an impending attack on Manuel Marulanda and Alfonso Cano in Casa Verde, Meta department and warned them of the attack early enough to allow for their escape.

Timochenko still commands the Magdalena Medio bloc, financing his troops principally by moving cocaine consignments from Colombia into Venezuela. He is wanted by the United States on drug trafficking charges and, like second-in-command Ivan Marquez, Timochenko has a \$5 million bounty on his head. As of July 16, 2012 Marquez and Timochenko have also been sentenced in absentia to 40-years in prison for their participation in a 1998 FARC attack against an army base in Miraflores, Guaviare department in which 800 FARC guerrillas stormed the army defenses and killed 16 soldiers and captured more than 120 policemen (*Elespectador*, July 19, 2008).

Some of the most valuable information about what Timochenko’s leadership will represent comes from the eight-years worth of e-mails that the Colombian army obtained from Raul Reyes’ computer at his hideout in Ecuador in 2008. Reyes’ letters revealed that Timochenko formed alliances with the National Liberation Army (ELN), a radical left-wing guerilla group based in northeast Colombia and in Venezuela, and other militant groups operating along the border. Timochenko also advocated a strategy of extorting money from foreign and domestic companies. In a February 2007 e-mail Timochenko said that businesses that failed to pay “taxes” should be “pressured” to do so through the coordination of different FARC blocs. Timochenko encouraged the use of landmines when he said, “The mines have been key in this last operation that took nearly six months. It seems [the companies] are leaving some sites” (Semana.com, January 14). [2]

Conclusion

Colombian authorities tracking Timochenko’s movements believe that he is more mobile than the FARC leaders before him and that he is in the Perija mountain range of Catatumbo near or inside the Venezuelan side border. [3] Timochenko reportedly operates in a fighting contingent of 800 fighters, 200 of whom are specifically assigned to protect him, but the various units have split up into such small groups that they struggle to coordinate with each other.

While the remoteness of Timochenko’s hideout helps to

ensure his safety and survival, he also runs the risk of becoming estranged from FARC fighters in other parts of Colombia who have little or no contact with him. His ability to continue to lead in the long-run will likely depend on factors outside of his immediate control, such as the health of long-time supporter Hugo Chavez, who now has cancer, and the unpredictable developments in Colombian-Venezuelan relations.

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Notes:

[1] See FARC “Timochenco” confirma muerte de Marulanda “Tirofijo.” May 25, 2008.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=sO1nwRXwKeo

[2] See The International Institute for Strategic Studies. The FARC Files: Venezuela, Ecuador and the Secret Archive of ‘Raúl Reyes’. <http://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-dossiers/the-farc-files-venezuela-ecuador-and-the-secret-archive-of-ral-reyes/>

[3] See map at: <http://colombiareports.com/colombia-news/news/22020-colombia-newspaper-claims-to-know-location-of-farc-leader.html>