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MODI GOVERNMENT REVEALS NEW INITIATIVES AGAINST THE NAXALITE INSURGENCY

Kathryn Basinsky

While Narendra Modi, India’s new prime minister, has been in office a little over 100 days, a number of new initiatives have been announced to further the fight against the Naxalite-Maoist insurgency, which has plagued central India for decades. Most of these policies continue the efforts of the previous administration to weaken the militants.

On September 15, a new training program for mid-level bureaucrats in combatting Naxalism and “Left Wing Extremism” was announced (*Times of India* [Mumbai], September 15). Officers from the Indian Administrative Service, Indian Police Service and Indian Forest Service will be trained by members of the armed forces in Chhattisgarh, one of the most affected states. The idea is intended to improve coordination between ministries and the Indian military as well as improve the country’s overall national security. This new program comes a few weeks after a new bounty of ten million rupees (\$164,000) on top Naxalite leaders, namely Muppala Lakshman Rao (a.k.a. Ganapathy), or for information on their whereabouts was announced (Press Trust of India, August 29). The Modi government has also replaced several police superintendents in Chhattisgarh with others whose districts have shown a decrease in insurgent activity (*The Hindu* [Chennai], June 12).

Naxalism is a far left-wing movement that began in West Bengal in 1967 after the Communist Party of India (Marxist) split. The movement spread southwestward into other states and controls a significant portion of territory in what is now called the Red Corridor. Today the Communist Party of India (Maoist) is the largest group of the movement, which follows Mao Tse Dong’s concept of a protracted people’s war to



Militants belonging to the Islamic State are shown attacking the Syrian Kurdish city of Kobani in a recent video.

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overthrow the current Indian government. Indian tribal groups (Adivasi) form a key population that supports, or is coerced into supporting, the Naxalites. These indigenous populations typically live in rural, isolated communities with little in the way of government services and do not have equal access to India's economic opportunities (DNAIndia.com, November 23, 2013). [1]

Naxalite groups are capable of large-scale attacks, often targeting infrastructure and industrial facilities within the Red Corridor. Naxalites recently blew up a railway used by power plants and the delay to reroute coal caused shortages and concerns over how much electricity could be generated, a critical need in India's growing economy (*Business Today* [New Delhi], October 12). On a day that Modi was campaigning in Chhattisgarh, roughly 200 militants attacked a steel plant and set 17 trucks on fire after locking up the employees (*Business Standard* [New Delhi], March 29). These industrial or economically crucial targets were chosen due to the communist nature of the insurgent group and the corruption that typically surrounds them. Police and military units are also preferred targets in standard insurgency tactics. In March, 100 Maoists ambushed 50 security personnel in Chhattisgarh, killing 15 (*The Hindu* [Chennai], March 13). There are many areas within the Red Corridor that are not under the control of state authorities, while in many others, government officials are under threat.

India's recent efforts against the Naxalites appear to be working. Up to 144 militants surrendered between May 16 and August 15; only 44 surrendered in the same period last year (*Times of India* [Mumbai], September 13). Also, the chief of the Central Reserve Police Force recently claimed "violent incidents perpetrated by Maoists against civilians have gone down" (Press Trust of India, August 29). Estimates have shown that the number of cadres has decreased over the past several years, though these numbers are a matter of contention, mostly because they are several years old.

Given how vocal Modi is about changing policies inherited from the back-to-back terms of Manmohan Singh, these new initiatives have received comparatively little fanfare. This is likely because the previous administration's counter-insurgency policies were having an effect and therefore, there was no need to focus on the Naxalite threat as strongly during the election cycle. Regardless, it appears that the Modi government is capably addressing one of India's most persistent domestic terrorist threats by instituting and continuing the preceding administration's effective counter-insurgent policies.

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Note

1. For more information on Naxalism and its leaders, please see Militant Leadership Monitor, April 29, 2010, [http://mlm.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=36336&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=568&no_cache=1#.VCNmQbBvZLc](http://mlm.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=36336&tx_ttnews[backPid]=568&no_cache=1#.VCNmQbBvZLc).

RUSSIA SOUNDS THE ALARM ABOUT THE THREAT POSED BY ISLAMIC STATE

Mairbek Vatchagaev

Russian observers reacted quite strongly to an Internet video released by the Islamic State, in which militants are threatening to launch a war in the Caucasus (al-Arabiya, September 2). The group, formerly known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), operates in Iraq and Syria as well as in Lebanese border areas,

The video lasts only one minute and 42 seconds and displays a group of militants inside an airplane hangar at the Tabaka military airport in Syria's Raqqa province, which was captured by insurgents. Several of them are seen climbing on an old, long-ago decommissioned Soviet MiG-21 jet. The video starts with threats against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, with a militant promising to attack al-Assad in his own jets. At one minute three seconds into the video, a militant sitting in a car next to the jet, apparently responding to the North Caucasian cameraman's request, starts addressing Vladimir Putin personally, in Arabic, threatening that the jets the Russian leader sent to help President al-Assad will fly back to Russia to liberate Chechnya and the entire Caucasus. Another militant, sitting in the cockpit of the MiG, declares that the insurgents plan to liberate Chechnya and the Caucasus "by the grace of Allah." The video is accompanied by a Russian translation (Ukrainian Independent News Agency, September 3). [1]

One would think that a statement by a random Arab militant would not concern Russian analysts, especially given that such statements have been made previously (Fondsk.ru, March 23, 2013). However, people in Russia took the statement much more seriously than it deserved at first sight. Ramzan Kadyrov, head of the Chechen republic, reacted first. Drawing attention to the video, the Chechen leader stated on his personal Instagram webpage: “Terrorists from Syria who call themselves ‘the Islamic State’ have made a childish threat to start a war in Chechnya and the Caucasus.” Kadyrov felt obliged to show that an ordinary militant could not have made a statement like that on his own, but only on the orders of the United States:

The militants in Syria and Iraq by themselves are nothing to be worried about... They are bandits who are trained and armed by the U.S.A. and by the West to destroy strong and resource-rich Islamic countries... I declare with all responsibility that whoever had the idea of threatening Russia and uttering the name of the president of our country, Vladimir Putin, will be eliminated right where he made that statement. [2]

Apparently not sharing Kadyrov’s optimism, the Russian Prosecutor General’s office demanded that the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media restrict public access to the Islamist terrorist group’s video threatening to launch a war in the North Caucasus (Newsru.com, September 4). YouTube blocked the video to users inside Russia (Interfax, September 4). However, the clip has been republished on multiple private channels, under different names, circumventing YouTube’s regulations and Russian wishes.

Meanwhile, the Investigative Department of the Federal Security Service (Federal’naya sluzhba bezopasnosti – FSB) began preparing a criminal investigation into “threats to carry out a terrorist attack and public calls for actions that are aimed at violating the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation” (Newsru.com, September 4). It is unlikely that Russian investigators will be able to determine the actual identity of the person who shot the video; thousands of people from the North Caucasian diaspora have traveled to Syria to help establish the Islamic State under the command of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. An ethnic Chechen, Omar al-Shishani, is one of al-Baghdadi’s closest associates (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta* [Moscow], July 7). The North Caucasians appear to be al-Baghdadi’s primary force, since they can afford to carry out attacks that local Arabs cannot. Omar al-Shishani’s rapidly growing wing of the group is likely to become the largest in the Islamic State before the

end of the year.

Why has Russia been so sensitive about a statement by Islamic State militants? The rebels, who are shooting videos, in which they discuss plans to help Russian Muslims and to organize a caliphate on Russian territory, hardly threaten Russian interests. Moscow should rather be concerned about the ideologues that are behind them, which actually threaten Russia. Instead of MiG-21s, their powerful propaganda spreads via the Internet into the brains of young people on a daily basis. Russia remains on the edge of an Islamic time bomb; it is only a question of time before it explodes.

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Notes

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M244nSFJXe8#t=15>.
2. <http://instagram.com/p/seyn7uiRl5/?modal=true>.

Boko Haram's Emerging Caliphate in Nigeria: Will Maiduguri Fall?

Jacob Zenn

On August 29, several hundred Boko Haram militants stormed the town of Gwoza in Nigeria's northeastern Borno State. Government buildings were taken over and churches destroyed, while local inhabitants were told that the town will be governed according to Shari'a (Sahara Reporters, August 12). A Boko Haram leader, possibly using the pseudonym of Boko Haram's leader since 2010, Abubakr Shekau, then issued a video stating that Gwoza was now an "Islamic State" that "has nothing to do with Nigeria anymore" (Africa Examiner, August 24). Several weeks earlier, this Shekau also declared his "support" for the leader of the Islamic State (formerly known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or ISIS), Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, among other jihadist leaders (*Vanguard* [Lagos], July 13).

Within two weeks of the Gwoza attack, Boko Haram also took control of Buni Yadi and Bara in Yobe state, Madagali, Gulak, Michika and Bazza in Adamawa state, Banki, Gamboru-Ngala, Ashigashiya, Kerawa, Dikwa, Damboa and Bama in Borno State, and several areas along the border with Cameroon. In total, an estimated ten towns in Yobe, ten towns in Borno and five towns in Adamawa were captured by Boko Haram in September 2014 (AFP, September 18). Nigerian military personnel and government officials in Borno have fled to Maiduguri, Borno's capital, and other states, while many of the traditional rulers, or amirs, have fled to Nigeria's capital of Abuja. These amirs abandoned their palaces, which in some cases Boko Haram occupied and enslaved the amirs' wives (*Nigerian Tribune*, September 6).

Boko Haram's capture of towns on Borno's perimeter and in Yobe and Adamawa states as well as in Cameroon is likely intended to isolate Borno from the rest of Nigeria and the neighboring countries of Niger, Chad and Cameroon. Borno was the birthplace of the Boko Haram movement in 2002 and is the homeland of the Kanuri people, who comprise the majority of Boko Haram members and leaders. Boko Haram will likely try to establish its own Islamic state roughly within the boundaries of present-day Borno State.

Boko Haram's early governance in Borno conforms to the plans that Shekau's former spokesman, Abu Qaqa, articulated to the Nigerian security forces during his interrogation in 2012. Abu Qaqa said Boko Haram wanted

to "to reduce the powers of the sultan to traditional rulership functions while all religious authority would be vested with [Boko Haram's] leaders," and "any ruler who would obstruct [Boko Haram's] plans would regret his action" (*This Day* [Lagos], March 8, 2012). Abu Qaqa meant that Boko Haram believes Nigeria's traditional religious leaders, such as the sultan of Sokoto and amirs, are illegitimate and deserve to be killed because they allow the mixing of Islam with "infidel" systems of democracy, Western education and secularism. Therefore, the sultan and amirs may only be called tribal leaders, or chiefs (*serkin*), while Boko Haram-approved religious leaders will take over religious positions as sultans and amirs. [1]

In executing this strategy, Boko Haram has attempted to assassinate Nigeria's traditional religious leaders since Abubakr Shekau announced the start of the "jihad" in 2010. Most recently, in May 2014, Boko Haram killed the amir of Gwoza while he was on the way to the funeral of the amir of Gombe (the amirs of Askira and Uba were also with the amir of Gwoza but survived the attack) (*Premium Times* [Abuja], May 30). Boko Haram took over Gwoza in August and in September took over Bama, a city of over 200,000 people, and expelled the amir of Bama (*Leadership* [Abuja], September 14). Boko Haram has since selected its own members to replace the amirs of Gwoza and Bama, including Muhammad Danjuma in Bama, who is reportedly known for his brutality. Boko Haram also replaced the amir of the historic Kanuri capital of Dikwa and the town of Damboa with Boko Haram-approved amirs (*Vanguard* [Lagos], May 31; Abusidiqu.com, August 13).

Rather than setting up administrative bureaucracies in Borno, Boko Haram will likely allow its amirs to govern according to their textual Salafist interpretation of Shari'a Law and its militants in areas under Boko Haram control to serve as the enforcers of the amirs' dictates. However, civilians may be left to manage their day-to-day affairs based on Islamic principles and Kanuri tradition. Boko Haram's apparent hands-off governance system stands in contrast to the reputation of the Nigerian security forces, who are feared in many parts of Borno for their occasional abuse of power and intrusions in the everyday lives of civilians. Boko Haram, though feared for killing and expelling civilians, especially Christians, and kidnapping young men and women, is not known for setting up government offices, ministries and departments like al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) did when they controlled parts of Mali and Yemen in 2012 and 2010.

For Boko Haram to sustain its control over territories in Borno in the long term, it will likely need to capture Maiduguri, located in the center of Borno. Such a development would be as symbolic and strategic a victory for Boko Haram as ISIS capturing Mosul in northern Iraq from the Iraqi government in June 2014. Moreover, it would show Nigerians that Boko Haram is not only a fringe movement on Nigeria's northeastern periphery, but that it can control a state of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Boko Haram's several thousand armed militants may not have the strength in numbers to take Maiduguri. However, the militants' probable strategy would be to attack the city in waves using forcibly recruited foot soldiers and weapons stored in towns outside Maiduguri and coordinate with cells in parts of this province that have long been sympathetic to Boko Haram. If Boko Haram could give the impression that it was invading and winning, including by distributing pamphlets and videos of beheadings of soldiers for psychological effect, it is possible that some soldiers and thousands of civilians would flee. This would leave the city – or at least parts of it – for Boko Haram's taking.

Boko Haram began gaining momentum around Maiduguri in early September, especially with its attack on the market town of Mainak, to the northwest of the capital on September 18 (*Daily Trust* [Abuja], September 19). Previously, Boko Haram's encampments around Maiduguri were mostly to the southwest, northeast and northwest of the city. However, on September 22, Nigerian and Cameroonian sources reported the death in Konduga, just south of Maiduguri, of Bashir Muhammad, who was using the pseudonym of Abubakr Shekau to issue statements on behalf of Boko Haram. The military's victory over Boko Haram in Konduga and the death of Bashir Muhammad could signal a morale boost for Nigeria and deflate Boko Haram's propaganda and lead to factionalization of its ranks (Sahara Reporters, September 22).

With or without "Shekau," the battle for Maiduguri will likely become a turning point for the Nigerian Islamist group: Either the Nigerian government will defend the city and roll back Boko Haram in Borno, or Boko Haram will infiltrate the city and further cement its budding Islamic state.

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Note

1. Muhammad Sani Umar, "The Popular Discourses of Salafi Radicalism and Salafi Counter-Radicalism in Nigeria: A Case Study of Boko Haram," *Journal of Religion in Africa* (Vol. 42, No. 2, 2012), pp. 118–44.

Kurdish Stronghold in Eastern Syria Defies Assaults by Islamic State

Wladimir van Wilgenburg

On September 15, the Islamic State, previously known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), launched a fourth siege on the Syrian city of Kobani (Ayn al-Arab in Arabic), capturing dozens of villages (International Business Times, September 22, 2014). The strategic location of the Kurdish-controlled town threatens the Islamic State's expansion toward the Turkish border from Raqqa and could possibly threaten the group's self-declared caliphate in the future.

Most likely, the Islamic State fears cooperation between the West and the Kurds in Syria to destroy the caliphate. These groups could follow the similar model used in Iraq, where Iraqi Kurds are successfully pushing back the Islamic State with Western support. Without this assistance, the Islamic State would be able to threaten Kurdish security. Now that the United States has bombed the Islamic State in Syria and is looking for local partners to fill up the power vacuum, the Syrian Kurds could possibly be an answer for the new U.S. strategy in Syria.

Siege of Kobani

Kobani was the first town to be captured by the People's Defense Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel – YPG), the main Kurdish militia group in Syria on July 19, 2012 in response to possible Free Syrian Army (FSA) incursions in the town (Al-Monitor, March 30). The YPG was created by militants of the Kurdistan Workers Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan – PKK) on a similar basis as the PKK's armed wing, the People's Defense Forces (Hêzên Parastina Gel - HPG) that fights NATO-member Turkey. One of the PKK's political branches in Syria, the Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat – PYD), dominates the political power vacuum that occurred after Assad's forces left, while the YPG defends the PYD's areas of operation. [1]

Islamist rebel groups and the Islamic State saw the YPG-controlled enclave as a main threat to control the Turkish border and accused the YPG and the PKK of working with the Assad regime after the Syrian government withdrew from the city in July 2012 (Rihab News, August 1, 2013).

The first siege started when the Free Syrian Army (FSA), the first group to fight the Syrian government, which formed in 2011, and other Islamist groups, including the Islamic State,

launched an assault on the town in July 2013, in order to break Kurdish attempts to create autonomous enclaves in Syria (Rudaw, August 6, 2013). The second one began in March 2014 and Kobani was besieged from three sides on March 15, 2014, which eventually failed (Al-Monitor, March 30). This was a response to FSA-YPG cooperation against ISIS in March 2014 (Al-Monitor, March 24), after the clashes erupted between the IS and other anti-Assad armed groups in January 2014 (*Daily Star* [Beirut], January 4). The Islamic State renewed their siege on Kobani for the third time in July 2014, after capturing most of the Sunni areas of Iraq in June with weapons captured from the Iraqi army (*Daily Star* [Beirut], July 11). This led the PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan, to call for a full mobilization of all Kurds to protect Kobani (IMC TV, July 10). This request possibly led to clashes between the Turkish army and PKK fighters on July 23, who tried to pass through the Turkish border (Firat News, July 23).

The latest siege on Kobani was launched on September 15, after the Islamic State switched its focus from Iraqi Kurds to Syrian Kurds since Western support for the Iraqi Kurds in early August stopped Islamic State militants from advancing on Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan.

The Kurdish Areas: Buffer or Obstacle?

Kobani is important to armed non-state actors in northern Syria for several reasons. First of all, it is centered between the YPG-controlled Kurdish enclaves of Afrin and Hasakah. As a result, the PYD created three canton administrations in Kobani, Afrin and Hasakah. The YPG has expressed ambitions to control the mixed areas in between these enclaves that mostly fall under Islamic State-control such as Manbij, Jarabulus and Tel Ebyad. Breaking the YPG's control of Kobani would dash any Kurdish hopes of creating a contiguous region (see *Terrorism Monitor*, May 2). Therefore, the PKK and PYD often have accused Turkey of supporting sieges against the PYD in Kobani to break the back of the Syrian Kurds. The PKK now accuses Turkey of backing the Islamic State offensive against the Kurds in order to create a buffer zone after Turkish diplomats were recently released in Mosul (Kurdistan24, September 22). Turkey has denounced any suggestions it supports the Islamic State as cheap slander (*Daily Sabah*, September 16).

The second reason the city of Kobani is strategically important is that anti-Islamic State factions could use the Kurdish regions as a buffer zone against the Islamic State. Since March 2014, the YPG and anti-Islamic State rebel factions have cooperated against their joint enemy from Afrin and Kobani while the Islamic State established full

control over the Arab areas in the Hasakah province (Al-Monitor, March 27). The YPG and PYD have realized that it is better to work with the FSA and Arab tribes to prevent threats to Kurdish territory.

Most likely these strategic calculations play a big part in the renewed Islamic State offensive against the Kurds in Kobani. The militant organization sees Kurdish Muslims as part of the greater Muslim community (*ummah*) and they are therefore a target for territorial expansion for the self-declared caliphate. “We do not fight Kurds because they are Kurds. Rather we fight disbelievers among them,” explained Islamic State spokesperson Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Adnani. [2]

Kobani was also depicted as a PKK-YPG stronghold and target by the Islamic State in their recent video release “Flames of War.” [3] “They [PKK] fought with a secularist ideology for the sake of land for a secular state. Strong fighters they were not,” the narrator of the video said, trying to dispel suggestions that the YPG is the most effective force to fight Islamic State jihadists after the PKK played an instrumental role in pushing back Islamic State advances in Iraq (VOA, September 11).

Statements released by Islamic State show that they possibly fear a joint YPG-PKK assault from Kobani on the Islamic State stronghold in Raqqa with direct Western air support or indirect support. The joint FSA-YPG military coordination body formed on September 11, before the latest siege stated that these two groups need international support to fight the Islamic State in order to eliminate them from Syrian territory (Aranews, September 12). This is one of U.S. President Obama’s stated goals and top American General Martin Dempsey has suggested that the United States arming Syrian Kurds was under consideration (AP, September 20). One of the stumbling blocks to this approach is Turkey, which considers the Kurdish autonomy in Syria a threat and has announced its intentions to form a buffer zone along its border (*Hurriyet*, September 16).

Conclusion

It is possible that in the future, the West will pressure Turkey to support an FSA-YPG buffer zone if the PYD decides to join the Syrian Coalition. The threat of the YPG to Islamic State territory is most likely the main reason for the Islamic State renewing its attacks on Syrian Kurds.

Moreover, the coalition already called for U.S. airstrikes to help the opposition protect civilians from Islamic State actions, indicating a possible policy change from the Syrian

opposition that had previously accused the PYD of working with the Syrian government (Qorvis.com, September 20). “The PYD wants to be part of the international coalition against the IS [Islamic State],” PYD leader Salih Muslim said recently, though the PYD was against any U.S. intervention in Syria in 2013 (Rojavareport, September 4, 2013). [4]

Even if Turkey blocks the PYD from joining the coalition against the Islamic State, the United States could indirectly support the PYD-FSA alliance by bombing the Islamic State, which would break the jihadist group’s advances and lead to expansion of FSA-YPG territory. This might result in a huge threat to the Islamic State stronghold of Raqqa, considering how close the Kurds are to that city. However, currently it still looks like the Islamic State is continuing its siege since the group’s positions around Kobani have not been targeted yet by external airstrikes. “Although the bases of the ISIL [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant – another former name for the Islamic State] and all [their] heavy weapons, vehicles and [equipment] are in open air and visible to everyone... They haven’t [been] targeted by the airstrikes,” said YPG-spokesperson Redur Xelil. [5] It is, therefore, most likely that the Islamic State wanted to prevent a Kurdish threat to areas the group controls by launching a renewed assault against Kobani.

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Notes

1. For an in-depth look at the various Kurdish groups, please see Terrorism Monitor, December 13, 2013, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Bttnews%5D=41754#.VCB9TCuSxuA.
2. Statement by Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, September 21, 2014, https://ia601400.us.archive.org/34/items/mir225/English_Translation.pdf.
3. “Flames of War,” Islamic State video, September 19, 2014, <http://world.al-mustaqbal.net/flames-of-war-video-transcript/#>.
4. Author’s interview with PYD-leader Salih Muslim, September 19, 2014, Brussels.
5. Press Statement by YPG spokesperson Redur Xelil, September 25, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/Redurxelil/posts/586100361495371>.

Taliban Devise New Strategy in Afghanistan: Territorial Control and War on Afghan Intelligence Headquarters

Waliullah Rahmani

On September 10, 2014, Kunduz province's police chief, Ghulam Mustafa Mohseni, announced that a longtime Taliban stronghold, the Chahar Dara district of northern Afghanistan, had been cleared of insurgents. Mohseni added that the Taliban lost around 210 members in the operations (ToloNews, September 10). The large number of Taliban casualties in Kunduz is one of the many instances of the widening insurgency in Afghanistan. Militants increasingly have been able to carry out attacks with hundreds of people fighting Afghan government forces for days and weeks in order to gain territorial control over specific strategically located areas of Afghanistan.

Along with these major and well-coordinated battles in the field, insurgents are now being used as assets in a clearly drawn intelligence war targeting the Afghan security establishment, with a particular focus on the Afghan domestic intelligence agency. The latest of these attacks was conducted in early September with a group of 19 suicide attackers targeting the National Directorate of Security (NDS) provincial headquarters in Ghazni province. The attack, which lasted for a few hours, was highly sophisticated and brutal, killing and wounding around 180 civilians and security personnel (*Daily Mail*, September 4).

Large groups of Taliban fighters in combat and an intelligence war are the two main pillars of a strategic shift in the broader strategy of the Afghan insurgency. This shift demonstrates that the Afghan insurgency has changed dramatically in 2014, as the country is heading toward a transformed role for NATO forces left in Afghanistan coupled with a political transition that has been underway for the last five months. Success for various groups of insurgents operating under the Taliban's banner could be a game changer and would allow the reemergence and reestablishment of a brutal regime in Afghanistan.

Struggle for Territorial Control

Since June, the Taliban have waged four major direct assaults in four Afghani provinces. The largest operation conducted so far has been in Helmand province. Reports suggest that 800 to 1,000 Taliban insurgents were involved

in major assaults on the Sangin, Nawzad, Mui Qala and Kajaki districts (BBC, June 25). Fighting there continued for weeks until the Taliban were defeated and areas were cleared; around 100 militants were reportedly killed during the fighting. The Taliban then shifted their operations to northern Afghanistan's Kunduz province where they fought for weeks to take control of the Khan Abad, Chahar Dara and Dashte Archi districts. As a result, they lost tens of their people and fought the Afghan security forces for weeks (ToloNews, August 24). Eastern Nuristan was another target of the Taliban in late August. Afghan security forces waged an eight-day operation to regain control of the province's Doa Ab district, killing around 30 Taliban (ToloNews, August 29). After being repulsed on three fronts, more than 1,000 insurgents then launched another operation in northwestern Farayab province in a struggle for territorial control of the Qaisar and Ghormach districts. The attacks continued for around a week and resulted in over 130 insurgent casualties (Pajhwok, August 18).

The deterioration of the security situation and a drawn-out, disputed political process have paved the way for the undertaking of a new strategy by the Taliban in Afghanistan. A senior security official in the Afghan government told Jamestown on the condition of anonymity that the Taliban's efforts for major gains in territorial control is planned mainly for 2015 when the NATO-led ISAF forces will be fully withdrawn and a fragile and weakened Afghan state will have the burden of stabilizing Afghanistan alone. Due to the political instability that emerged during the long-time disputed elections and an uncertain NATO presence, however, the Taliban began implementing their new strategy in 2014, a strategy that the Afghan official termed as a defeated one. [1]

Intelligence War

From the outset of the post-Taliban state in Afghanistan, there have been discussions of a proxy war that is underway in Afghanistan. Senior Afghan officials have always pointed fingers at Pakistan for supporting the insurgency in Afghanistan. [2] Pakistan and its foreign policy masters have continuously denied any involvement in the destabilization of Afghanistan. They have called on the Afghan leaders to stop their so-called "blame-game," which Islamabad has always deemed destructive to bilateral relations.

A new chapter of the intelligence war has already begun in the form of the growing insurgency, which is directly targeting strategic national security institutions of Afghanistan, the most productive and critical tools in the

broader counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency efforts of the country.

In a chronological view, 2012 was the outset of a number of selected attacks targeting the Afghan domestic intelligence agency, the National Directorate of Security (NDS). On December 6, 2012, Asadullah Khaled, the then-head of the NDS, survived an assassination attempt though he was seriously injured in the attack. This was followed by the January 13, 2013 assault on the NDS headquarters in the heart of Kabul (al-Jazeera, December 7, 2012). Attacks on the NDS and the regional offices continue through today. More recently, on May 6, the Delaram district office of NDS came under attack by unknown insurgents. In Jalalabad, on August 30, a heavy and devastating assault was launched on the provincial office of NDS, a few kilometers away from the Khyber Pass on the eastern border (ToloNews, September 18). The latest attack occurred earlier this month in Ghazni province, in which more than 18 people were killed, around 150 were injured and several government buildings worth at least \$85 million were destroyed (*Daily Mail*, September 4).

While it is not clear why the Taliban would be motivated enough to wage sophisticated and costly operations against a specific security establishment in Afghanistan, an in-depth look into the last two years of the blame game could yield a better understanding. The Taliban have claimed responsibility for all of these attacks, but on various occasions the Afghan government has blamed Pakistan instead for targeting Kabul. [3] Recently, Islamabad blamed the Afghan NDS of plotting the June 8 attack on the Karachi airport. However, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility for that attack, which lasted several hours (*Guardian*, July 9). Soon after this accusation by Islamabad, on July 2, the Kabul airport was hit by two rockets, which destroyed a military facility and a number of helicopters. This attack was followed by one on July 17, in which five suicide attackers captured a nearby building in order to then attack the Kabul airport. Soon after the second attack, the Afghan Ministry of Interior (MoI) blamed the Haqqani Network and the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency. A MoI spokesman stressed that the attack on the Kabul airport was plotted to avenge the coordinated attack on the airport in Karachi (Khaama Press, July 17).

Moreover, the serial targeting of NDS offices in various provinces of Afghanistan became a main pillar of the current insurgent strategy after Pakistani authorities accused the current acting director of the NDS,

Rahmatullah Nabil, of having a hand in the Karachi airport attack in mid-June. The Afghan government denied any involvement (ToloNews, June 22).

While no documents have been presented to uncover the role of the NDS behind the alleged plots against Pakistan, a recent public statement from outgoing Afghan president Hamid Karzai clearly states why, from his perspective, Islamabad is supporting instability in Afghanistan. In return for stability and an end to the Afghan insurgency, Pakistan wanted the Durand Line resolved as well as sole control over Afghanistan's foreign policy and international relations, demands that Karzai has never accepted. [4]

Many in Kabul believe that the nearly continuous attacks on the security establishment of Afghanistan have become a key pillar of the Taliban's new strategy. If true, a settlement of the Afghan insurgency and peacefully ending the current instability in Afghanistan may be an impossible goal.

Conclusion

The Taliban insurgency's new approach features large attacks across the country designed to seize and maintain control of territory as well as the specific targeting of intelligence branches. These two methods are tactically and strategically threatening the future of a functional and stable Afghan state. At the same time, Afghans are experiencing the end of the NATO-led ISAF mission. In spite of the difficult security transition taking place and the uncertain political transition, in 2014, Afghan security forces have responded enormously well to the new tactical and strategic shifts of the insurgency even in the most volatile southern regions of Afghanistan. Nevertheless, it is feared that the "resolute mission" of international forces in Afghanistan will not be enough to sufficiently curb terrorism and the insurgency, which threatens to take control of even larger swaths of Afghan territory following the reduced role for U.S. and NATO force in Afghanistan in 2015.

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Notes

1. Author's discussion with a senior security official, September 10, 2014.
2. Pakistan has been blamed for supporting the Afghan insurgency on various occasions. Most recently, Karzai Blamed Islamabad for blocking his government from striking a peace deal with the Taliban. For more, see <http://>

www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/afghan-president-hamid-karzai-blames-pakistan-attacks-article-1.1739863.

He also blamed Pakistan for an attack on the Indian Consulate in Herat province after two such attacks in seven years on the Indian Embassy in Kabul: see http://articles.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/2014-05-28/news/50149429_1_indian-embassy-afghanistan-president-hamid-karzai-cross-border-terror. Afghan officials accused Pakistan of plotting an attack on an Afghan army outpost in Kunar: see <http://dunyanews.tv/index.php/en/Pakistan/213330-Afghan-official-blames-Pakistan-for-deadly-attack->. Furthermore, for almost two years, Afghan security agencies have reported shelling from Pakistan in the eastern provinces of Afghanistan. Recently, the Afghan government has gone to a level of threatening Pakistan with full scale war if the shelling is not stopped. For more on this, see <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2014/06/02/365213/kabul-ready-to-retaliate-pak-aggression/>.

3. Most recently, the Afghan government accused Pakistan of plotting an attack in Kabul against presidential frontrunner candidate Dr. Abdullah Abdullah. Dr. Abdullah survived the suicide attack assassination attempt. For more on this attack on Abdullah, an attack on Kabul's IEC office and many more examples, see <http://www.khaama.com/pakistan-based-lashkar-e-taiban-behind-attack-on-dr-abdullah-6195>.

4. Live broadcast of Afghan President departing speech for 100s of Afghan government officials and presidential staffers, Radio Television of Afghanistan (RTA), September 22, 2014.