

Terrorism Monitor

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KENYA: SEEKING PARTNERS FOR A NEW TERROR STRATEGY

Alexander Sehmer

Jordan's King Abdullah has promised greater counter terrorism support to Kenya during a meeting with Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta in Nairobi. The visit has received a good deal of publicity in Kenya, where the two leaders were photographed greeting each other on the tarmac of Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, both dressed in military fatigues (The East African, September 26). The two leaders then viewed an anti-terrorism training exercise, with units from both the Kenyan Defense Forces and the Jordanian military simulating a response to an aircraft hijacking and an attack on a village (Daily Nation, September 26).

Kenya is keen to obtain greater international support for its anti-terrorism efforts. Nairobi's recently announced National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism revises efforts to tackle extremism at home and calls for greater coordination with international partners (see [Terrorism Monitor](#), September 30). The Jordanian visit offers some well-timed publicity for President Kenyatta in this respect.

Nairobi already receives anti-terror support from the West, including from the United States as part of the Partnership for Regional East Africa Counterterrorism, or PRACT. Nevertheless, Kenya's relationship with the West on terrorism issues is not always a comfortable one. Kenyatta has shown himself happy in the past to use the so-called war on terror to put his Western allies under pressure, warning in May that Kenya could scale back its military engagement in Somalia if international partners did not help fund its efforts (Africanews, May 22). That was likely posturing on the Kenyan president's part – al-Shabaab poses a more immediate threat to his country than to the West – but the tactic appears to have had some success, with the European Union recently stepping in to ensure African Union troops in Somalia receive their pay (The Star [Kenya], September 26).

Meanwhile, rights groups accused Kenya's U.S. and UK-trained Anti-Terrorism Police Unit (ATPU) of rights abuses and extrajudicial killings, and Western security officials privately complain Kenyan security services frequently ignore their recommendations. Despite the tensions, the relationship with the West is crucial for Kenya. For all the fanfare in Kenya, the anti-terror aspect of the Jordanian deal centers on training for Kenyan military

pilots, while trade ties were the major focus of the leaders' meeting (Africanews, September 26).

For Jordan, King Abdullah's visit was more an opportunity to open up an African market to Jordan's defense and other industries; certainly that is how the monarch's trip was framed back home (Jordan Times, September 26).

PHILIPPINES: COLORFUL LANGUAGE BUT LITTLE ACTION ON ABU SAYYAF

Alexander Sehmer

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte called for U.S. military advisers in the country's south to be withdrawn on September 12, arguing that they were targets for Abu Sayyaf militants operating in Mindanao (Daily Inquirer, September 13). The comments come amid a torrent of anti-American rhetoric from Duterte, which has included insulting President Barack Obama and vowing to end joint military exercises (Daily Inquirer, September 28). For all his colorful language, however, there has yet to be any official signs of disengagement with the United States (Daily Inquirer, September 29).

The ramping up of this kind of language may be partly because Duterte is courting Chinese investment, including a proposed railway system in Mindanao, something China appears minded to do (Manila Bulletin, August). The focus on China has even led Duterte to indicate he could set aside a longstanding dispute between the two nations over islands in the South China Sea (Daily Inquirer, February 29).

In fact, such a concessions seem unlikely as it would call into question Duterte's nationalist credentials, and row back on comments he made during his election campaign when he assured voters he would jet ski to the islands and plant his country's flag there himself (Asian Economist, April 27).

Similarly, Duterte can ill afford to have U.S. advisers pull out of Mindanao.

U.S. forces have been in Mindanao since 2002, aiding the Philippines' military in its fight against Abu Sayyaf, and while more than a decade of military operations has failed to dislodge the group, U.S. involvement has immeasurably strengthened the Philippines' military's effectiveness. Joint operations ended last year, but a small number of U.S. military advisers remain and it is these that Duterte wants removed.

Since taking up the presidency in June, Duterte has maintained a relatively conciliatory stance towards Abu Sayyaf, focusing instead on his violent and much criticized anti-drugs efforts. Now the Philippines' president appears set to change tack.

At the beginning of the month, a bombing claimed by Abu Sayyaf killed 15 people in Davao, where Duterte used to be mayor. In the aftermath of the blast, the Philippines' president, speaking from Laos where he was taking part in an ASEAN meeting, vowed he would "crush" the militants and "eat" them alive (Philippine Star, September 7).

Should the Philippines' president attempt to tackle Abu Sayyaf in a similar manner to how he has dealt with drug dealers, he may feel constrained by his U.S. military allies, but such a move would surely seem unwise. Possibly Duterte's comments are simply bluster. Certainly it remains to be seen whether they herald any real change, either in relation to the U.S. advisers or in terms of his strategy for taking on the militants.

Kenya Unveils New Strategy for Tackling Terror

Sunguta West

Kenya has launched a new strategy aimed at preventing violent extremism, unveiling it against a background of increased threats from Somalia's al-Qaeda affiliated al-Shabaab, home-grown militants and, more recently, suspected Islamic State (IS) sympathizers (The Star, September 16).

President Uhuru Kenyatta launched the strategy on September 7 in a speech from State House Nairobi, which was itself recently targeted in a series of grenade and Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attacks linked to suspected al-Shabaab members (Capital FM, September 7).

Kenyatta has vowed the new National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (NCVE) will rally the government, civil society, the private sector and Kenya's international partners behind the country's counterterrorism efforts. The plan, with its emphasis on deradicalization over heavy-handed tactics, is seen by Kenya's counterterrorism experts as critical to dealing with the terror threats the country faces.

Implementing a New Strategy

Kenya's National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC), which is run by the office of president and coordinates all government counterterrorism efforts, will implement the NCVE. Heading it up is NCTC director Martin Kimani. An experienced diplomat, as well as a military educated and regional security expert, his role is to ensure smooth coordination with regional and global partners.

Kimani was previously the permanent representative and head of mission to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). A good deal of his experience comes from having worked as director of the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism, an agency of the Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) based in Addis Ababa Ethiopia, an organization that works to prevent conflict in the Horn of Africa. He has also held senior positions at the Atlantic Council in Washington DC and worked in various capacities in currency and bond trading, political risk analysis, policy de-

velopment and regional security (The Standard, January 11).

Kimani's time heading up the NCTC has been relatively successful. On his watch, terror attacks in Nairobi, Mombasa and Garissa have declined, and the scale of attacks witnessed along the border with Somalia have been reduced. These are mainly ambushes and "night raids." On September 21, for example, al-Shabaab fighters attacked Hamey Police Station in Garissa County, killing two police officers. The militants stole guns, ammunition and a police land cruiser (The Standard, September 21). Over 4,400 rounds of ammunition, an MG3 machine gun, two G3 rifles and a VHF radio set were also taken (Daily Nation, September 26).

Emphasis on Deradicalization

For years, Kenya's anti-terrorism efforts have focused largely on the deployment of the security forces, with the country sending troops into Somalia in 2011. Inside Kenya's borders the police have heightened border surveillance and carried out raids in neighborhoods in Nairobi and Mombasa, as well as in Garissa town (The Standard, April 14, 2014). Yet al-Shabaab has continued to pose a significant threat, evidenced by the Garissa University attack in April 2015 and the attack on the Westgate Shopping Mall on September 21, 2013.

The NCVE, which adds prevention and counter-radicalization elements to existing anti-terror approaches, has the prevention of extremist groups from radicalizing ordinary Kenyans as one of its key aims. A statement on the NCVE from the president's office stresses the importance of the rehabilitation of Kenyan nationals who are former al-Shabaab combatants. [1]

This is a welcome change in focus. In 2015, reports suggested that nearly 700 combatants who had earlier left to fight for al-Shabaab in Somalia had quietly deserted the battlefields and returned to Kenya. Some left the radical group to take advantage of a Kenyan government amnesty, announced by Interior Minister Joseph Nkaissey in April, while others left the jihadists after the lucrative deals al-Shabaab promised them turned out to be less remunerative than expected (The Star, October 21, 2015).

With the influx of former militants, it is perhaps unsurprising that experts have concluded there has been a

shift in the principle terror threat Kenya faces – from that posed by Somali militants, to that posed by home grown terror cells (Daily Nation, March 10).

Security Forces 'Infiltrated'

Increasingly Kenya's security agencies have highlighted the problem of radicalization within local communities. In schools over the last few years, school heads have grappled with concerns that al-Shabaab agents have penetrated their institutions, allegedly influencing students and recruiting some to their cause (The Star, August 7). Near the Somali border, the police have on several occasions arrested students travelling to Somalia to join the ranks of militant groups and in some cases have rounded up students allegedly intending to join IS in Libya and Syria (Kenyans, February 19; The Star, August 2).

At first the radicalization and recruitment efforts targeted youth in majority Muslims regions like Nairobi's Eastleigh neighborhood, northern Kenya and the coastal region of Mombasa, but this appears to have changed. Militants now also recruit from non-traditional Muslims regions. Factors such as poverty, unemployment and a lack of opportunities for young people are seen as the drivers of radicalization, but another important factor may be grievances around marginalization as a result of race or tribe (Daily Nation, July 4, 2015).

Meanwhile, reports also suggest that members of al-Shabaab's Amniyat, the group's intelligence wing, have targeted the security forces. In July, a police officer killed seven of his colleagues at a police station in Kapenguria, West Pokot County in what has been portrayed as a lone wolf attack. The officer was later gunned down by members of the elite Recce squad of the General Service Unit (GSU) following an eight-hour siege at the police station (Daily Nation, July 14).

Investigations have since shown that the officer had a network within the service. According to some reports, he had attempted to bribe other officers to release a terror suspect held at the station, while his bank account is said to have contained more than \$30,000 that could not be properly accounted for (Daily Nation, July 14; The Standard, July 14).

In August, a police raid targeting a former Recce elite squad officer who had deserted the force discovered

three AK47 rifles and 178 round of ammunition. The operation followed reports the officer had been radicalized and was planning to attack a GSU camp in the Ruiru area near Nairobi, which hosts the elite squad (The Star, August 4). He had reportedly been seen attending the radical Riyadhha Mosque in Nairobi, where hardline sermons are preached.

Under Scrutiny

Kenyan military efforts in Somalia have had some success in countering al-Shabaab, but fresh thinking on anti-terror strategies in Kenya is clearly to be welcomed. Kimani appears well placed to facilitate the planned coordination with regional partners the NCVE envisages; and the emphasis on deradicalization efforts is pertinent given the number of former al-Shabaab fighters returning to Kenya.

Nevertheless, recent reported incidents of radicalization within the security services are a troubling development and a reminder that Kenyan counterterrorism officials will need to monitor just how effectively its new strategy plays out.

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NOTES

[1] See the statement from the Kenyan president (September 7)

Boko Haram in Senegal: Expanding West Africa Province

Jacob Zenn and Abdou Cisse

During the past six years, Boko Haram has been principally operational in Nigeria and, to a lesser extent, in neighboring Niger, Chad and Cameroon. Now, beyond Nigeria and its border regions, Senegal has unexpectedly become a country where the group is attempting to expand its regional influence both ideologically and operationally.

In Nigeria, Abubakar Shekau, as the head of Jamatu Ahlis Sunna Lidawatti wal Jihad (JAS), announced his jihad against Nigeria and the United States in 2010. Later, in 2015, he pledged allegiance to Islamic State (IS), rebranding as IS' West Africa Province, although the media still tends to refer to both entities as Boko Haram. Since IS dropped Shekau from the leadership position of West Africa Province in favor of Abu Musab al-Barnawi in August 2016, West Africa Province has mostly focused on the border areas between Nigeria and its neighboring countries. Shekau, who has since August 2016 reverted to his original position as leader of JAS, is largely focused on the interior parts of northeastern Nigeria's Borno State.

While many Senegalese jihadists profess admiration for Shekau, it is unclear if he is really behind Boko Haram's Senegal "project." The movement instead appears to be mostly a Senegal-born initiative driven by Senegalese imams who have adopted a Boko Haram salafijihadi ideology in opposition to their forefathers' sufi heritage. Moreover, factional leaders close to Abu Musab al-Barnawi seem more likely to be involved in the project, given their experience and regional contacts.

Nonetheless, such a project is of value to IS and could be emblematic of the way IS and an "independent" JAS under Shekau can still cooperate on certain matters, despite the very public differences between them.

The Senegal 'Project'

The most prominent Senegalese imam linked to West Africa Province is Alioune Ndao of Kaolack, a city outside of Dakar. According to the Senegalese security forces, when Ndao was arrested, he had two satellite

phones that showed constant communication with West Africa Province. Ndao was also the Quranic teacher of Makhtar Diokhane, who was arrested by Nigerian authorities in Niger in November 2015 for sending money from West Africa Province to his wife in Senegal in support of the project.

Diokhane was in Niger to negotiate the release of three detained fighters (Seneweb, August 17). In court, he acknowledged that West Africa Province wanted to finance a cell in southern Senegal, but argued that he stayed with West Africa Province (in Nigeria or Niger) only so as to teach the Quran to fighters, not to participate in the conflict himself.

Ndao and Diokhane were not the only Senegalese connected to West Africa Province. Authorities said a Senegalese individual arrested in Dakar had been communicating with his brother who was in Nigeria fighting with West Africa Province (Premium Times, November 13, 2015). The man, whose name was not released, was one of several Senegalese citizens found to be communicating with, or receiving money from, relatives in West Africa Province.

There is no apparent connection between either Ndao or Diokhane to Senegalese foreign fighters with IS in Libya (Seneweb, June 2). Nonetheless, among the estimated 30-plus Senegalese foreign fighters with IS in Libya, a number of them joined *salafi* organizations in university or in mosques before traveling to Libya. Some of them also intended to join West Africa Province in Nigeria, following the advice of IS spokesman Muhammed al-Adnani, who called on fighters who could not reach Syria to go to Libya or Nigeria. Indeed, one of the Senegalese foreign fighters with IS in Senegal was known as Shekau al-Senegali, in deference to Abubakar Shekau (Seneweb, July 23).

The Question of Nigerian Leadership

Although most Senegalese citizens arrested in connection with the West Africa Province's efforts in Senegal, as well as Senegalese foreign fighters with IS in Libya, reference Shekau as their inspiration, it is unclear whether Shekau is, in fact, leading the project from his base in northeastern Nigeria. Indeed, it seems likely another militant leader is behind it.

For one, Senegal is a Francophone country, and presumably a French-speaking member of West Africa Province or JAS from Niger, Cameroon or Chad would be better placed to manage the project (Shekau speaks Hausa, Fulani, Arabic and passable English, but not French).

One such fighter is French-speaking Mahamat Daud, who facilitated the movement of Nigerians to fight with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and allies in northern Mali in 2012, but broke from Shekau in 2015 over his targeting of IDP (internally displaced people) camps in Borno State. Shekau believed Muslims in the IDP camp were guilty of *shirk* (worshipping an entity other than Allah) for collaborating with an un-Islamic government, while Daud and other fighters with AQIM disagree with this religious interpretation (France24, August 13, 2015).

Another leader who could orchestrate a relationship between West Africa Province and Senegal is Mamman Nur. Despite now being associated with West Africa Province and loyal to Abubakar al-Baghdadi, Nur was associated with AQIM and al-Shabaab in 2011 when, with their support, he masterminded the suicide bombing at the UN Headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria, which killed 22 people (Sahara Reporters, August 5; Sahara Reporters, September 18, 2011). Nur could leverage regional connections in West Africa, including to other AQIM-turned-IS members, to provide funding to aspiring West Africa Province militants in Senegal (France 24, February 1).

Another possibility is Nigerian Khalid al-Barnawi, a former associate of Mokhtar Belmokhtar in Algeria and a founding member of the Ansaru faction, which broke away from JAS in 2012 over disputes over Shekau's ruthless leadership style and self-serving religious interpretations. He reportedly has businesses in Senegal through which he could fund the project (fulansitrep, November 24). Although he was arrested in April 2016, the Nigerian army has continued to accuse Ansaru members of facilitating the flow of Nigerian foreign fighters to IS in Libya, which would indicate Ansaru, like other former Nigerian AQIM associates, now operates alongside IS. In Libya, Ansaru militants could easily interact with other sub-Saharan foreign fighters, including Senegalese, Ghanaians and Malians who, like the Nigerians, have been prominently featured in IS propaganda from Libya (The News [Nigeria], August 22; Vanguard, April 3).

Shekau is mostly based in Sambisa Forest in Borno State and is ideologically aligned with foreign jihadist groups – first al-Qaeda, then IS and now as an al-Baghdadi loyalist but not part of IS. However, unlike Daud, Nur, Khalid al-Barnawi, or current West Africa Province leader Abu Musab al-Barnawi, he has always been the recipient of support from these groups rather than the driving force behind the relationship.

So while Senegalese members of the project revere Shekau for his ideology and charisma, it seems more likely that one of these other figures facilitated the Senegalese relationship with West Africa Province.

A Truly West African Province

The most likely scenario is that, like past examples of the evolution in Nigerian jihadism, such as the formation of Ansaru or West Africa Province ahead of Shekau's pledge to al-Baghdadi, multiple factions and leaders have had a hand in the Senegal project.

The Senegal project is, in any event, fairly small in scale, but given the split between Abu Musab al-Barnawi and Shekau, an attack by West Africa Province in Senegal could elevate the former's status in his competition with Shekau. That could, in turn, motivate new *salafi* cells in Senegal or spark other "start-up" initiatives in West Africa.

The IS leadership would likely also see value in West Africa Province carrying out an attack beyond Nigeria and its borderlands. Such a move would prove the West Africa Province is truly West African, and help stymie the narrative of an IS decline.

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The Taliban's 'Double Act': Will the New Leadership Strategy End Infighting in the Group?

Waliullah Rahmani

On September 8, 2016, the recently appointed Taliban leader Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada released his Eid al-Adha message. While much of the language is familiar – he terms the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan a puppet state working for foreign infidels imposing their will on the country – the tone he adopted is very different to that of his predecessors, stressing religiosity and even talking of a "new era" into which the Taliban has entered (Chekad, September 9)

Akhundzada's Eid message addresses issues of governance and public relations, as well as moral issues affecting fighters within the Taliban ranks across Afghanistan. He claims in his message that his group of fighters controls vast tracts of Afghanistan that are in need of governance and he orders his commanders and various council members in the field to govern the people in those areas with "justice and equality."

He calls for them to implement sharia but also to build trust with the local inhabitants, including preventing Taliban fighters from treating citizens badly. In the final two paragraphs, he points the finger at Afghans who support and work for the government of Afghanistan and calls on them to leave their government jobs. Lastly, he calls on the international community, referring to the Taliban's political office and saying: "We want to have relations with international players and address their concerns and questions regarding us so that, in the future, we protect our country from harm by others, and nothing bad should take place in others' affairs from our country."

The message appears more inwardly focused, directed at the Taliban's rank and file in Afghanistan, and this internally-focused Eid message may have its roots in the threatened splintering of the group that began when Mullah Mansoor, Akhundzada's predecessor, took over leadership of the group in July 2015 (Khabar Online, April 9).

Three months after Mansoor's death, it would appear the risk of fragmentation within the Taliban remains a major issue for the group. Certainly Akhundzada's Eid message suggests the issue continues to take up the time and energy of the insurgency's new leadership.

Under New Leadership

Following Mansoor's death in a U.S. drone strike in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan in May, Akhundzada was named as the Taliban leader, the figurehead of the insurgency in Afghanistan. The announcement was made on May 25, with the group at the same time naming Akhundzada's deputies – Mullah Yaqub, the son of Mullah Omar, as the Taliban's first deputy leader, with Sirjuddin Haqqani, the son of Jaluluddin Haqqani and leader of the brutal Haqqani Network (HQN), named as second deputy leader (al-Jazeera, May 26). Both are young and from well-known Taliban leadership families.

Prior to taking on the leadership of the group, Akhundzada had been the deputy Taliban leader. Under Mansoor, he was an ideological guru of the insurgency. He was not known for his military mind, instead his focus was on legitimizing the Taliban's tactics, including its use of suicide attacks, through his *fatwas* (Islamic religious decrees), attempting to give the violent acts some basis in *sharia* and painting them as a route to paradise.

Mansoor had been a divisive figure within the Taliban. His appointment, which followed the delayed disclosure of the death of the then Taliban leader Mullah Omar in 2015, had encountered considerable resistance from many Taliban commanders, with a group of some of the most influential figures forming a breakaway group under Mullah Rasool (BBC, November 4, 2015). While Mansoor was militarily-speaking a strong and established figure, he lacked religious legitimacy and was deeply uncharismatic. For the first time, the Taliban had been in danger of fragmenting into smaller groups.

By contrast, with his established religious background, Akhundzada was seen as someone who could unify group. He had the religious credentials deemed necessary for acceptance among the leadership and field commanders of the Taliban.

The 'Real Mastermind' Behind the Insurgency

During the discussions over who would replace Mansoor at the head of the insurgency, Haqqani was considered to be a leading candidate to replace Mansoor by many informed circles in Pakistan close to the ISI, Pakistan's military intelligence agency that is alleged to have supported HQN (Express Tribune, May 22).

Despite his role as second deputy leader, many policy makers and media pundits see him as the guiding hand behind the Taliban's strategy in Afghanistan, and the true commander of the insurgency (AAN, February 10). He has for more than a decade run the HQN, a branch of the Taliban with a strong terror network in the large cities of eastern Afghanistan and in the capital city of Kabul. Under Haqqani, the HQN has waged some of the most bloody and sophisticated suicide operations seen in the capital for at least for the last six years (Tolonews, January 22).

Since 2003 Haqqani, who has a bounty of up to \$10 million under the U.S. Rewards for Justice Program, has moved steadily into the central command structure of the Taliban from a position on the sidelines of the insurgency (Khabarnama, September 7). He has managed to run the most brutal terror network in Afghanistan under the Taliban banner with a degree of sophistication and success.

As the head of HQN, Haqqani has been able to put pressure on the Afghan capital leaving parts of it in lock down for hours through suicide operations. With focused attacks, such as the one targeting the aid organization CARE International, he has gained the attention of the international media (FirstPost, September 6). The attacks have instilled fear in Afghan citizens, affected the Afghan economy and disrupted the activities of international organizations in Afghanistan. They have also raised the profile of the Taliban among militants and prompted the United States to add the HQN to its list of designated terrorist groups in 2012. It may well be this notoriety, Haqqani's high profile record as one of the most wanted on the terror lists in Washington, which prevented him from assuming Taliban leadership.

In a surprise move following the announcement of his role as a Taliban deputy leader, Haqqani released an audio message in which he hinted at a possible openness to peace talks, as long as they were held in accordance with *sharia* (Express Tribune, June 15). But Pakistan's ISI and other backchannel contacts of the Taliban

believe that under Haqqani's leadership the already stalled peace would be unlikely to occur at all.

Some analysts believe that Pakistan is pushing for this slow "Haqqanization" of the Taliban. Some say that by making Haqqani the second in command of the Taliban and associating him with the peace talks, he is being protected from the United States and its international allies (Indian Express, May 8). However, an increased association of HQN with the Taliban is likely a move that will prolong the Afghan conflict rather than progress any negotiations.

While there may be some acceptance of Haqqani within the second rank of the Taliban leadership, the upper echelons of the group are not ready to give their blessing to Haqqani who is young and lacks religious credentials. Haqqani also does not share the leadership's Southern Durrani ancestral roots – the Taliban leadership and founders come from southern Afghanistan and their roots are in Kandahar, Helmand and Uruzgan province. It is still too early to talk of a transformation of the leadership of the group to an easterner like Haqqani.

Uniting the Taliban

The new Taliban leadership is following a two-fold policy of unifying the Afghan insurgency by weakening the splinter groups that threaten it, and expanding the conflict across Afghanistan. This dual strategy means there are roles for both Akhundzada and Haqqani.

As he stated in his Eid message, Haibatullah wants his field commanders and council members to expunge from their networks criminals and offenders, and promote confidence-building measures. He plays a unifying role as Taliban leader with the potential to issue fatwas that could be expected to delegitimize splinter groups and overly ambitious commanders no longer interested in serving in the Taliban ranks.

Meanwhile, Haqqani can focus on expanding the insurgency to multiple battlefields in Afghanistan. Since May 2016, with the Taliban under this new command, the group has focused on fighting in large numbers in the battlefields as well as targeting high-profile targets with suicide operations in Afghanistan's major cities and provincial capitals. His successes as commander-in-chief have been mixed, however, as Taliban forces were ultimately prevented from capturing the cities of Helmand

and Uruzgan provinces in the south, and are facing heavy casualties and defeat in northern provinces of Kunduz, Takhar and Balghan.

Akhundzada and Haqqani's "double act" has also yet to see lasting success in terms of unifying the insurgency. The Taliban's major splinter group, under the command of Mullah Rasool, still has a significant presence in western Afghanistan and has waged brutal attacks against Taliban forces loyal to Akhundzada (Khaama, June 22).

Another group known as the Mullah Dadullah Front (Mahaaz-e-Dadullah) has reemerged following the death of its leader, Mullah Mansoor Dadullah, killed during infighting in Zabul province last year (Pajhwok, November 12, 2015). Mullah Emdadullah Mansoor, a nephew of Dadullah, now leads the group. As conflict season in Afghanistan this year draws to an end, it appears that despite escalating the geographical scope of the insurgency, the Taliban's new leaders have been unable to bring the splinter groups to heel.

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