INDONESIA: JAMAAH ANSHARUT DAULAH'S FAMILY APPROACH AND FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT CHALLENGES INDONESIAN FORCES

Brian M. Perkins

Indonesian security forces have launched a significant crackdown on suspected members of the IS-linked group Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) following a suicide bombing at a police station in Medan that injured at least four police officers and two civilians (South China Morning Post, November 16). The attack came just weeks after a husband and wife duo belonging to JAD stabbed Indonesian Security Minister Wiranto, who uses one name, in West Java. The country has seen a recent surge in terrorist activity over the past six months, despite several notable JAD members being arrested or killed. Incidents over this timespan have highlighted two particularly troubling trends—close familial connections among JAD members and militants' ease of movement.

The latest security operations led to the arrest of at least 43 individuals connected to JAD, including the wife of the Medan attacker, Rabbial Muslim Nasution, and several others linked to the bombing. Indonesian police

reported that some of the suspects had undergone military training on Mount Sibayak in the Karo area—a famous tourist destination—of North Sumatra and that the Densus 88 counter-terrorism squad had killed two skilled bombmakers who supplied the device used in the attack. Authorities also reported that Nasution's wife, who remains unnamed, was plotting an attack in Bali (Benar News, November 18).

In October, a father and son were arrested in Bali for plotting an attack on resorts in the popular tourist destination. Authorities reported that the two were in possession of arrows and bayonets and that they were closely connected with the couple responsible for Wiranto's stabbing through an extremist WhatsApp group called Menanti al-Mahdi (Merdeka, October 17).

JAD does not have a well-defined structure and a large portion of dismantled cells have consisted of families and close knit communities, many of which have been influenced via closed Telegram or WhatsApp groups such as Menanti al-Mahdi that are often initially spread through word of mouth and Indonesian language jihadist magazines that emphasize an "all Muslims" approach to recruitment of fighters. Women and children have been an increasingly important feature of militant

groups, such as Islamic State, but considerably less so in non-conflict zones, which makes the situation in Indonesia particularly unique.

Many of the attacks have been unsophisticated or unplanned. The Wiranto stabbing was reportedly mostly happenstance and planned moments beforehand despite the couple being under police surveillance ([Jakarta Post](#), October 15). Other attacks, however, have demonstrated a significant level of facilitation that has involved radicalized individuals traveling undetected across Indonesia's numerous islands to receive training or conduct attacks.

The number of attacks and arrests over the past year has highlighted a steady rate of radicalization that is only likely to increase as President Joko Widodo's newly announced cabinet is staffed by former military and police officials intent on regulating society along national security grounds. Islamic State's increased focus on Southeast Asia coupled with the difficulty of securing an archipelago will continue to plague Indonesia as it continues to struggle to keep tabs on individuals already on security forces' radar. Meanwhile, the clear emphasis on recruitment and radicalization within families will make it increasingly difficult for security forces to disrupt plots that are planned during face-to-face meetings at home between family members. These plans often use unassuming women and children, which makes detection particularly difficult.

Brian M. Perkins is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor

DESPITE MURKY DETAILS, ATTACK ON BORDER POST UNDERLINES TERROR THREAT IN TAJIKISTAN

Brian M. Perkins

Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K) suffered a major setback in November after hundreds of members, including a notable number of Tajiks, surrendered in the face of operations by Afghan and coalition forces in the country's eastern Nangarhar province. The group, however, is far from defeated and is still influencing and recruiting foreign fighters from other Central Asian nations, particularly Tajikistan. Tajiks have long been a feature of Afghanistan's militant landscape and though there is not a known operational network in Tajikistan, these fighters and those they inspire still pose an existential threat to the country.

The terrorist threat was highlighted again in November after a deadly attack on a border post in Ishkobod, just 30 miles west of the capital Dushanbe ([Gandhara](#), November 6). According to Tajik authorities, at least 20 IS-K fighters entered Tajikistan from Afghanistan before making their way to the post over the course of several days and storming members of the Sultanabad border guard detachment. According to initial government statements, 15 of the assailants, a police officer, and a border guard died during the attack. IS later claimed responsibility for the attack, releasing a video claiming to be of the attackers pledging allegiance to the group's new leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashemi al-Quraishi. The veracity of the claim, however, is still unclear. Similarly, the circumstances surrounding the government's version of the story illicit serious doubts as to whether the attack emanated from Afghanistan or from within its own borders. Whether or not the government is obscuring the facts of the case is not clear, as Dushanbe has often done previously following past terrorism-related incidents.

The Tajikistani government narrative on terrorism has been focused on external threats, downplaying the reality of the internal threat from radicalized locals as well as the volume and importance of Tajiks fighting alongside IS-K in Afghanistan. Despite the government's claim that the assailants came from Afghanistan, other sources have reported that many of the assailants were local Tajikistanis living in the country ([Gandhara](#), November 13). Further, sources within the police have claimed more guards/police were killed than officially reported.

Aside from an Islamic State-linked attack on foreign cyclists and a prison riot by IS inmates, Tajikistan had largely been spared from significant attacks by both international terrorist organizations and radicalized individuals. The country, however, has been a noteworthy recruitment ground for the larger IS group as well as the nearby IS-K, which counts a Tajik, Sayvaly Shafiev, among its leadership ([RFE/RL](#), August 12). This attack, regardless of some of the uncertain details, raises further concerns surrounding reports that individuals such as Shafiev have been training fighters to return to Tajikistan to establish terror cells. This is in addition to concerns regarding the return of foreign fighters, which have been dealt with haphazardly. Tajikistan has already granted amnesty to hundreds of fighters who have returned since 2015.

A clearer picture of the incident is still needed to truly address the implications of the attack, but it does raise several important issues. If the assailants did in fact cross into Tajikistan from Afghanistan, how were they able to do so undetected over such a distance and time span? Perhaps a more concerning scenario, however, would be if several of the assailants were local citizens and helped facilitate the attack alongside militants coming from Afghanistan. This would point to an even more concerning trend of the threat turning inward and the potential existence of local IS-linked cells.

Brian M. Perkins is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor

Burkina Faso: Jihadists' Ethnic Strategy and the Koglweogo Problem

Nicholas Lazarides

The Sahel has quickly become an epicenter of terrorism, with the once relatively stable Burkina Faso on the verge of replacing Mali as a focal point of jihadist violence. Instability from the prolonged conflict in Libya has been emanating into Mali and beyond since the fall of Ghaddafi in 2011 and the subsequent influx of weapons and fighters. This influx, coupled with the lack of effective state control and flexible narratives espoused by terror groups in the region, allowed militant groups to gain a strong foothold in southern Mali. The violence inevitably began to spill across the border into Burkina Faso and Niger as militants expanded operations and found haven near the Sahel Reserve, a protected wildlife area that straddles the borders of the three countries.

The primary jihadist groups responsible for attacks in Burkina Faso are Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM), Islamic State Greater Sahara (ISGS), and the locally grown Ansaroul Islam. The dramatic increase in terrorist attacks in Burkina Faso, however, is not solely indicative of a newfound support base and is as much a reflection of the ease in which these groups can exploit and operate in areas characterized by ethnic diversity and a lack of basic services and state control, particularly by police or security forces. Jihadist groups have been responsible for a staggering number of attacks over the past three years, but the second order effect of widespread communal violence has been equally devastating and, if unchecked, could outlast the existence of these jihadist organizations and become a lasting fixture of Burkinabe society.

Burkina Faso had historically been characterized by moderation and the peaceful coexistence between the country's ethnic and religious groups. That coexistence, however, has dissipated throughout much of the country and has been replaced by ethnically fueled massacres, disappearances, and other widespread abuses that act as a feedback loop for jihadist groups seeking to exploit the turmoil and recruit marginalized Muslim youths. The rapid increase in ethnic violence has been fueled by two primary factors—the tactics of jihadist groups and the

proliferation of self-defense militias known as *koglweo-go*.

Much like in Mali, militant groups have pursued a strategy to exploit social cleavages in the country's remote northern and eastern regions, depicting themselves as guardians of marginalized groups and fueling the insecurity needed to operate largely unopposed. These groups began by focusing on attacks against the state to deter police and military operations before increasingly targeting churches and mosques. In October, an attack on a mosque in Oudalan province killed at least 16 worshippers, and in early December, an attack on a protestant church left 14 dead in Hantoukoura (LeFaso.net, October 13; LeFaso.net, December 2). Gunmen have also engaged in targeted attacks on moderate imams and Christian clerics to foment animosity between religious groups (Twitter.com/menastream, September 25, 2018). Many of the deadly attacks on mosques and churches are not officially claimed, likely as part of a strategy to create confusion, pit communities against one another, and spark reprisals by ethnic militias. This strategy has not worked as well as intended, likely due to the prevalence of interfaith communities and families, so jihadists have increasingly targeted Mossi and Foulse ethnic groups to foster an ethnic rivalry against the Fulani rather than push a broader Muslim-Christian rivalry.

Burkinabe police and security forces are largely absent in the country's Sahel, Centre-Nord and Est regions. In areas where they do patrol, they only do so during the day before retreating to safer areas before nightfall for fear of attacks by jihadist groups. As such, the culprits of attacks are rarely identified or brought to justice, creating suspicion among the various ethnic and religious community members while also forcing the state's reliance on *koglweogo* who live in the communities.

Koglweogo were a response to the lack of effective state control in much of the country, with some groups dating back to at least 2009. [1] *Koglweogo* have proliferated independently of the state over the past several years due to the instability that followed the ouster of former President Blaise Compaoré in 2014 and more recently because of the threat from jihadist groups. These self-defense militias across the country are not entirely homogenous, but they are predominantly Mossi in the Sahel, Centre-Nord, and Est regions, where jihadist attacks have been most prevalent (LeFaso.net, February 20; infowakat, November 15). *Koglweogo* are

now an embedded feature in towns and communes across the country and are funded and supported by local administrations, state authorities, and through donations from community members. Burkina Faso's overwhelmed police and security forces have increasingly attempted to integrate these groups into the country's security framework by using them as an extension of formal security forces, with the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization and Security recognizing many *koglweogo* groups ([Taz](Taz), April 27). Despite recognizing and tacitly supporting their existence, the government has no real control mechanisms or actual oversight over their actions.

The jihadists groups operating in the region are historically Fulani-oriented and have capitalized on the Mossi ethnic makeup of the *koglweogo*, who have responded to attacks by cracking down on the predominantly Muslim Fulani ethnic group, which is a minority in Burkina Faso as a whole. Unclaimed attacks likely perpetrated by jihadist groups are routinely followed by *koglweogo* detaining, torturing, evicting or summarily killing Fulani community members accused of harboring or being linked to jihadist groups. For instance, a nighttime attack in January that killed seven people in the village of Yirgou, Barsalago province—a predominantly Mossi village—triggered a violent response by the local *koglweogo*, which razed countless homes and killed upward of 40 Fulani men and children accused of harboring jihadists (LeFaso.net, January 9). Countless similar incidents have taken place across the country, with hundreds of Fulani members killed and thousands displaced while those who stay have taken up their own arms or joined jihadist camps.

Large scale operations by Burkinabe military forces have only managed to displace jihadist groups to other areas while creating mistrust among communities due to alleged abuses. The military does not have the capacity needed to sustain operations, hold territory, and provide a constant security presence, making the *koglweogo* a necessary aspect of the government's security plan. Given the fact they have primarily served to foment widespread ethnic violence, however, there is a glaring need for the government to rein in these groups by creating some sort of oversight and control mechanisms while also seeking to hold accountable those who have committed crimes against Fulani community members. The government should work quickly to promote reconciliation between ethnic groups to quell the violence and cycle of vengeance. Reconciliation will help dry up re-

cruitment streams for jihadist groups seeking to capitalize on the Fulani's marginalization and will prevent communal violence from becoming a lasting issue that would persist even if the country manages to quell the jihadist threat.

Notes

[1] Koglweogos: The Risk of Community Ownership of Security, *Centre for Democracy and Development.* *https://cddelibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Koglweogos-the-Risk-of-Community-Ownership-of-Security.pdf*

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Islamic State and AQAP Could Exploit Disorder in Southern Yemen

Brian M. Perkins

Though the war in Yemen is far from over, the conflict is at least seemingly moving in a more positive direction as the Saudi coalition is engaging in indirect talks with the Houthis and facilitating a fragile ceasefire referred to as the Riyadh Agreement between the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and the Hadi-led government. While the Saudi coalition is working to address two of the most glaring issues in the war, another key problem has been left festering—the persistence of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Islamic State in Yemen (IS-Y). AQAP is very much still alive and has always been quick to exploit security vacuums and the moments between governance transitions. IS-Y, while not particularly strong, is still capable of playing a spoiler in the war and could see growth if the war provides the operational space.

There has been little concerted effort against AQAP since the group was pushed out of its many traditional safe havens in the coastal regions of Yemen's southern governorates and corralled deeper into al-Bayda, Hadramawt, and Marib between 2015 and 2016. AQAP's retreat inland was prompted more by constant pressure from UAE-trained and backed forces—which provided the bulk of the forces fighting in the south—than actions by the Yemeni military and forces loyal to President Hadi or Saudi Arabia.

Similarly, IS-Y saw its operational space shrink as UAE-backed forces secured southern governorates, cutting off IS-Y's access to resources and its ability to recruit. As such, IS-Y was never quite able to find solid footing and gain a large, loyal following. The nascent group did, however, manage to carry out several significant attacks against government and military forces early after its formation.

Despite intermittent clashes, STC-aligned forces and Hadi loyalists had managed to maintain a level of stability and security in southern Yemen that prevented AQAP and IS-Y from operating freely or regaining territory. That fragile balance now hinges on an ambitious and high-stakes agreement that will be incredibly difficult to

implement and could see a resurgence of AQAP and IS-Y activity.

Riyadh Agreement

The Riyadh Agreement calls for a significant transformation of governance structures as well as an overhaul of the management and structure of security forces in southern Yemen. This overhaul will see Saudi Arabia assume command of southern coalition forces from the UAE, the removal and redeployment of fighters from Aden, and the integration of STC-aligned forces into the Yemeni military under the defense ministry's control. Such a complicated and contentious transition, particularly if not smoothly managed, will undoubtedly have significant implications on AQAP and IS-Y's strength and area of operations.

The Riyadh Agreement hit its first 30-day deadline with little to no progress on the restructuring of the government and security forces. Instead, clashes between STC-aligned forces and the Yemeni military killed more than 40 people in the Ahwar district of Abyan in the final week before the deadline ([Aden News](), December 5). With the agreement already beginning to seemingly falter, there are two primary scenarios to consider that, should they occur, would serve to benefit AQAP and IS-Y.

The first scenario that could see resurgent AQAP and IS-Y activity is if the Riyadh Agreement completely breaks down and widespread fighting between the warring parties resumes. Key members of the STC are keen to see the agreement succeed as it serves to legitimize it as a political entity within the country's political field, but tit-for-tat clashes by disparate southern units and the Yemeni military could easily derail the process. Additionally, moving forward, any perceived imbalance with northern forces or political figures could see the rift open once again. Similarly, Hadi and government aligned figures will be quick to respond if STC members or allied forces appear to be working in their own favor rather than toward a government set mandate. Flare ups are likely throughout the process, but a complete breakdown of the agreement would likely see more intense fighting than was witnessed in August. The resumption of hostilities could once again allow AQAP to move outside of its primary base and exploit the tumult, potentially allowing it to gather valuable resources or retake territory, particularly in the already highly contentious Abyan.

The second and equally as likely scenario is that the bureaucratic shift and change of command will lead to a fractured and less effective military force with an unclear or controversial mandate. A unified military command will undoubtedly see STC-aligned fighters being integrated alongside their hated rival, Islah. Mistrust between the two will undoubtedly create problems, as many of the recent clashes have been between STC forces and those aligned with Islah. It is also not entirely clear what the integrated military's tactical priorities will be moving forward; will the focus be more on the Houthis or stabilizing security in the mostly pacified southern governorates. Saudi Arabia and Hadi have little incentive to take the fight directly to AQAP at its current base in al-Bayda as the group and its allied militias still act as a hedge against the Houthis. Further, the redeployment and integration of STC-aligned forces and equipment will be time consuming and will likely create security vacuums, even if only temporarily, that AQAP and IS-Y will undoubtedly continue to exploit.

AQAP and IS-Y Quick to Exploit Instability

The majority of AQAP's claimed operations since late 2017 have centered around the Qayfa area of al-Bayda, which is coincidentally also the stronghold for IS-Y. A large percentage of AQAP and IS-Y operations over the past two years have been against one another, with each group only claiming sporadic, opportunistic attacks on the Houthis and UAE-backed southern forces. The small percentage of noteworthy attacks outside of this area, however, should not be viewed as an indication of weakness for either group, particularly AQAP.

Many of AQAP's major territorial losses in southern Yemen over the past several years were tactical retreats rather than substantial battlefield losses and the group still commands a force estimated in the thousands. AQAP demonstrated how quickly it could exploit chaos in southern Yemen when tensions between the STC and government forces first erupted into open fighting in August. In what was its most active month in the past few years, AQAP conducted a series of deadly attacks against STC-aligned forces beyond its base in Qayfa, including an attack on the al-Mahfad army base in Abyan that killed 19 ([Aljazeera](), August 2). AQAP also managed to temporarily seize control of Abyan's al-Wadea district—President Hadi's birthplace and a previous base of AQAP operations ([MEMO](), September 9; [Middle East Eye](), September 14, 2017). AQAP has reportedly been moving back into Abyan over the past

several weeks, with reports of fighters moving about more freely as tensions have mounted over the lack of progress toward the implementation of the agreement.

IS-Y is considerably less adept than AQAP, but it has also demonstrated its resilience and ability to exploit instability and operate outside of its primary stronghold in Qayfa. IS-Y claimed responsibility for a series of suicide bombings and assassinations in Aden throughout August, its first operations in the city since early 2018. Along with the claims of responsibility, IS-Y shared images reportedly depicting each one of the attacks. More recently, on December 7, IS-Y released a message and photographs claiming responsibility for the assassination of Mohammed Saleh al-Radfani, a senior commander from the STC-aligned Security Belt Forces.

AQAP and IS-Y are still operational and have preyed on the instability caused by the conflict between the STC and the Hadi-led government. The security situation in southern Yemen has not deteriorated enough yet to allow either group the ability to regain significant swathes of territory, but uncertainty surrounding the agreement and intermittent clashes will continue to create pockets of instability in the near term. There have been upwards of 13 assassinations in Aden since the 30 day deadline passed on December 5 ([Middle East Eye](#), December 12). Looking forward, the slow implementation of the agreement will almost certainly create new security vacuums that IS-Y and AQAP will be keen to leverage to seize territory and resources, or at the least, sow further disorder through assassinations and attacks on security forces. In the worst-case scenario of a complete breakdown in the agreement, fighting between STC forces and Hadi loyalists will likely intensify beyond previous levels and create the same type of security environment that allowed both AQAP and IS-Y to control territory during the early days of the war.

Brian M. Perkins is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor

Hizb ul-Ahrar: Pakistan's Cross-border Taliban Problem Remains Critical

Animesh Roul

Following a notable lull in militant activity, Pakistan is now facing a unique militant escalation targeted against its security forces in the North Waziristan area and bordering regions. Despite the Taliban force largely being subdued following the concerted counter-terrorism efforts by Pakistan's military, such as Operation Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad, a resurgent faction Hizb-ul-Ahrar (HuA) has been carrying out targeted attacks in regular intervals. Although these incidents are downplayed by the Pakistani military as being sporadic and low-scale violence, several Pakistani soldiers and police officers have been killed by HuA in daring targeted assaults in the past year.

HuA, a violent offshoot of Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) and Pakistan's Tehrik-e-Taliban (TTP), claimed responsibility for at least four attacks in November 2019. On November 29, at

least fourteen people were injured when a bomb planted in a stationary rickshaw detonated near Chauburji on Multan Road in Lahore ([Dawn](#), November 30). On November 12, three Pakistan Army soldiers were killed in North Waziristan's Miranshah. On November 14, a senior police official, Ghani Khan, was killed in the Mian Gujjar area of Peshawar city ([Dawn](#), November 15). In early November, HuA also claimed responsibility for killing four Pakistani soldiers in North Waziristan's Razmak area ([Gandhara](#), November 4).

Taliban Legacy/ Offshoot

Two years ago, on November 11, 2017, a disgruntled Taliban commander Mukarram Khan formed HuA in the bordering Nangarhar province of Afghanistan after breaking away from the violent sectarian faction of TTP and JuA led by Abdul Wali Raghib. Abdul Wali, also known as Umar Khalid Khorasani, died in a U.S. drone strike in the eastern Afghan province of Paktia in October 2017 ([Express Tribune,](#) October 20, 2017). Most of the senior commanders of JuA were also killed in that strike. With Wali's death, JuA virtually ceased to exist and paved the way for dissenting commander Mukarram

Khan to form the Hizb-ul-Ahrar. Mukarram Khan, a Taliban commander from Mohmand Agency (in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), had served under the Jamaat-ul Ahrar banner as a Shura member and head of its intelligence wing. However, the HuA leadership at the time moved away from the parent group due to JuA's rabid sectarian ideals, mostly targeted against minority Christians and attacks on civilians. HuA also took umbrage of the JuA's un-Islamic practices such as extortions and kidnappings for ransom. Instead, HuA vowed to target only Pakistan's security forces, including the army and police (The Nation, November 12, 2017).

Besides Mukarram Khan, several senior Taliban commanders are involved in spreading violence in different capacities. Jihadaar Mehsud, Muslim Yaar, Haji Rashid, and Qari Ismael Afridi are some prominent HuA commanders. Imran Khurasani of Mohmand Agency became a deputy of Mukarram Khan. The spokesperson of the group since its inception has been Aziz Yousafzai (Pakistan Today, November 13, 2017; Dawn, September 18, 2018).

HuA was banned in August 2019 under Section 11-B of Pakistan's Anti-Terrorism Act (Dawn, August 23). Much before the government imposed the ban, however, HuA stormed into Pakistan's extremely dynamic jihadist landscape with some of its deadliest attacks. For example, the Lahore suicide blast outside the Data Darbar, one of the historical Sufi shrines in the country. The suicide attack at Data Darbar killed 11 people on May 8, including several policemen and civilians. But Yousafzai had claimed that 'the suicide attack was carried out at a time when there were no civilians near the police (Express Tribune, May 9).

Operation Bin Qasim to Shamzai

The investigations into the Data Darbar blast revealed how HuA scouted young boys from the border regions of Afghanistan and recruited them as suicide bombers. The bomber at Data Darbar Shrine was identified as Sadiqullah Mohmand, an Afghan under 17 years of age who targeted a stationary police van near the Sufi Shrine, detonating approximately seven kilograms of explosives. According to HuA, the ongoing attacks are part of its 'Operation Shamzai' (named after influential Deobandi Islamic cleric Mufti Nizamuddin Shamzai) launched in February 2019 targeting security forces (Daily Pakistan, May 8; Express Tribune, May 21). It has also urged other militant groups to collaborate and carry out similar campaigns targeting security forces in Pakistan.

The Data Darbar attack was a major suicide operation claimed by HuA outside of its usual sphere of influence in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. HuA militants were particularly violent in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in early 2019. In February, HuA militants killed four police officers on the Indus Highway in Dera Ismail Khan (Dawn, February 13). In addition to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, HuA claimed responsibility for several attacks in Baluchistan, Sindh (Karachi) and Punjab provinces since its emergence in late 2017. In August, HuA carried out its first attack in the capital, Islamabad, killing two policemen (The Nation, August 22).

Similar to Operation Shamzai, HuA launched operation 'Mohammad bin Qasim' in April 2018 as part of its so-called nation-wide campaign of violence against the Pakistani army. The group began this anti-military offensive with coordinated attacks in Quetta city in April 2018, killing 6 policemen (Samaa TV News, April 24, 2018).

Inciting Jihad for Sharia

Though similar attacks against security forces in the region are often attributed to HuA, the group usually prefers not to claim immediate responsibility. The group, however, does release statements and audio-visuals through its official media arm 'al-Ahrar Media' to claim attacks, and subsequently shares its work through affiliated Telegram channels. HuA also occasionally uses the Urdu language periodical Ghazwa-e-Hind (military conquest of India by Muslim warriors) as its political, military, and ideological mouthpiece. Through Urdu language publications, HuA encourages students to take up jihad to establish an Islamic state in Pakistan in accordance with Sharia law. Declaring the Pakistani military and the government as 'Apostate', HuA's propaganda materials are targeted at inciting madrasa students to take up arms.

The Pakistani security establishment realized the specter of this Taliban faction in May 2018 when HuA suicide attacks targeted security infrastructure in Attock, Punjab and Nowshera, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. On May 3, a suspected HuA militant carried out a suicide attack on a bus carrying NDC (National Defense Complex) engineers in Attock. The attack killed four people and left several injured. Again on May 17, HuA carried out another suicide attack on a Frontier Corps convoy in Nowshera, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that injured several people (Dawn, September 18, 2018, Express Tribune, May 17, 2018).

Following several military operations against the group's strongholds in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in August, the counter-terrorism department of the provinces' police forces claimed to have demolished HuA's support structures and foiled several plans by arresting members of the group. However, a dramatic spike in HuA's attacks in November 2019 rendered a completely different picture on the ground, demonstrating the remarkable resilience of this Taliban offshoot. One of the core strengths of HuA remains its cross-border presence and ability to launch attacks on Pakistani forces from Afghan soil by employing suicide bombers and hit and run tactics. Evidently, the situation in North Waziristan and larger Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remains critical, despite Pakistan's claim to have reined in Taliban militants in the northwestern tribal areas bordering Afghanistan.

Animesh Roul is the executive director of the New Delhi-based policy research group Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict. He specializes in counterterrorism, radical Islam, terror financing, and armed conflict and violence in South Asia.