

Terrorism Monitor

In-depth analysis of the War on Terror

VOLUME XIX, ISSUE 2

p.1

Jacob Zenn

BRIEFS

p.4

Sudha Ramachandran

Hefazat-e-Islam Bangladesh's Rivalry with Awami League: The Growing Islamist-Secular Divide

p.6

Can Kasapoglu

Turkey Enters Tunisia's Weapons Market With Combat-Proven Arms: A Technical and Strategic Assessment

p.8

Abdul Sayed

The Jihadists' War in Pakistan after the U.S. Withdrawal from Afghanistan: Lessons from Al-Qaeda's Assassination of Benazir Bhutto

PROUD BOYS AND ANTIFA FACE UNCERTAIN FUTURES AFTER CAPITOL SIEGE

Jacob Zenn

After the January 6 Capitol storming, the Proud Boys are reassessing tactics. The group formed in 2017 to be an "anti-Antifa" organization and promote "traditional" masculinity and Western-centrism, as opposed to feminism and multiculturalism. No Proud Boys have killed anyone, which distinguishes it from typical terrorist groups, and its violence has almost exclusively involved street brawls with Antifa. In October 2018, among the first Proud Boys imprisoned for brawling with Antifa outside New York's Republican Club was New Jersey resident John Kinsman (northjersey.com, October 22, 2018). Antifa had vandalized the club before Proud Boys founder Gavin McInness gave a speech. Another Proud Boy, Tusitala "Tiny" Toese, also pled guilty to misdemeanor assault of Antifa activists in June 2018 and was jailed for 10 days in October 2019 for violating probation stemming from another December 2017 brawl with

Portland's "Rose City Antifa" (oregonlive.com, October 24, 2019).

Besides clashing with Antifa, Proud Boys made a name for being "bodyguards" for conservative speakers at university campuses, especially Ann Coulter. Proud Boys, for example, accompanied her to a University of Oklahoma speech in November 2020 (oudaily.com, November 5, 2020). McInness and other Proud Boys also traveled to University of California-Berkeley in 2017 for Coulter's anti-immigration speech, but the speech was canceled over concerns Antifa would disrupt Coulter and clash with Proud Boys (latimes.com, August 30, 2017). McInness nevertheless gave Coulter's speech on her behalf outside campus (therolladailynews.com, April 27, 2017).

After George Floyd's May 2020 death, Antifa's street presence increased drastically, especially alongside Black Lives Matters protesters (see Terrorism Monitor, December 5, 2020). Proud Boys, meanwhile, allied with "Patriot groups" at "pro-police rallies" and continued clashing with Antifa activists, who supported disbanding the police (seattletimes.com, August 9, 2020). Weeks

before Joe Biden's January 20 inauguration, Proud Boys, who supported Donald Trump, clashed intensely with Antifa in Washington D.C. for the first time, instead of Portland and Seattle where previously clashes occurred ([The Telegraph](#), December 13, 2020). Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrío, who replaced McInness in 2018, was barred from Washington D.C. after those clashes because he was charged for Proud Boys' burning of a Black Lives Matter banner at a church yard ([YahooNews.com](#), January 5).

Several Proud Boys, but not Tarrío, subsequently took part in storming the Capitol on January 6 ([WSJ](#), January 26). They expected to clash with Antifa during Trump's speech, but Antifa did not show up. Thus, some Proud Boys, including a top leader, Joe Biggs, did not wear the typical Proud Boys' yellow and black clothing to disguise themselves, but they still were seen in the Capitol in ordinary clothing ([Washingtonian](#), December 31, 2020). Biggs, for example, was recorded pulling down his COVID-19 mask and saying "This is awesome" when he entered the Capitol building ([Twitter.com/@shoot_the_glass](#), January 18). He was later arrested in Orlando ([orlandosentinel.com](#), January 21). Another Proud Boy, Gabriel Garcia, who lost a Republican Party primary race to represent Miami in the state legislature in August 2020, was also arrested for storming the Capitol. Garcia had reportedly said "Nancy [Pelosi], come out to play" in the Capitol ([local10.com \[Miami\]](#), January 22).

Since the Capitol storming, Tarrío, who himself has been "outed" as a former FBI informant, which could damage his credibility, has declared the group will take a "chill pill" and become less active in the streets ([newsweek.com](#), January 27; [usatoday.com](#), January 14; [global-news.ca](#), January 10). This came amid the Canadian Parliament recommending that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau designate the Proud Boys as a "terrorist group" for being white supremacist and a hate group, while U.S. officials and activists are considering the same ([Twitter.com/@huffpost](#), January 29; [newsweek.com](#), January 11). The Biden administration has also promised to combat "domestic violent extremism (DVE)" ([NBC-news.com](#), January 23). The term DVE, however, deviates from "racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism" (REMVE), which emerged under the Trump administration and would have seemingly more specifi-

cally targeted the Proud Boys. Despite Tarrío being Black Cuban-American, Toese being American Samoan, Kinsman being married to a Black woman, Garcia being Latino, and another Black member, Philip Anderson, whose tooth was punched out by an Antifa-allied Black Lives Matter activist at an "anti-tech censorship" protest last year, the Proud Boys has been unable to shed the label of being white supremacist or embracing "multiracial whiteness" ([abc7news.com](#), October 21, 2020; [Washington Post](#), January 15).

The Biden administration's broader focus on DVE means that the Proud Boys and other pro-Trump groups that stormed the Capitol could come under greater scrutiny. However, Antifa, could also receive some of the same attention from government agencies. Antifa is, after all, violent, opposed to Biden's left-center record, and has vandalized Portland shops and even the Democratic Party's Portland headquarters following Biden's inauguration ([forbes.com](#), January 21). After the inauguration, Twitter began restricting Antifa social media accounts and Seattle increased penalties for Antifa-style vandalism for the first time ([nypost.com](#), January 22; [Seattle-times.com](#), January 23). Moreover, the "free reign of violent anarchists [Antifa]" can no longer be pinned on "Trump's America," nor can Antifa's activities after the inauguration be reduced to an "idea" ([YouTube.com/JoeBiden](#), August 29, 2020; [usatoday.com](#), October 1, 2020). Therefore, both the Proud Boys and Antifa will have to adapt to survive in the Biden era.

Jacob Zenn is the editor of Terrorism Monitor.

WILL CHAD AND CAMEROON 'MOW THE LAWN' AGAINST ISWAP AND BOKO HARAM

Jacob Zenn

Amid continued attacks at Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP)'s highest tempo in years, Chad and Cameroon are planning an offensive into northeastern Nigeria's Borno State to oust ISWAP from its strongholds ([HumAngle](#), January 21). The previous Chad-led offensive in April 2020 occurred after a major attack by the Bakura sub-faction of ISWAP's rival, Boko Haram, in Bohoma, Chad, which killed 92 Chadian soldiers (see [Terrorism Monitor](#), May 1, 2020). Chad's offensive succeeded in limiting the Bakura sub-faction's operational tempo. While the offensive also targeted ISWAP, it did not go far enough into Nigerian territory at that time to reduce ISWAP's capabilities such that ISWAP would no longer be a threat around Lake Chad ([africanews.com](#), April 11, 2020).

Even before the April 2020 Chad-led military offensive, the Lake Chad-based Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) comprising Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin launched other offensives against ISWAP. In 2015, for example, the major offensive in Borno enabled Nigeria to retake virtually all towns that ISWAP controlled ([France24](#), June 11, 2015). However, by 2018 ISWAP was resurgent and in 2019 it began retaking Nigerian military posts ([Vanguard](#), January 3, 2019). The 2015 offensive, like the April 2020 offensive, saw some short-term counter-terrorism results, but few longer-term successes.

The question now is whether Chad and Cameroon see ISWAP and Boko Haram gaining strength and fear ISWAP may begin conquering territory again. ISWAP, for example, captured the Marte military base in Borno for a day on January 17 before the Nigerian Air Force struck several of its gun trucks as they departed the base to return to their hideouts ([premiumtimes.ng](#), January 17). If Chad and Cameroon do have this concern about ISWAP, then their intentions for mobilizing to enter Borno to attack ISWAP and Boko Haram may simply be to reduce these groups' short-term ability to launch incursions into their own territories.

Alternatively, if Chad and Cameroon's intentions are to deliver ISWAP and Boko Haram a decisive blow, one would expect a larger mobilization and more public announcement of the imminent military offensive, including from Nigeria. All that has come from Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari is an announcement that Nigerian military commanders will be replaced, but nothing on a multi-national offensive yet ([punchng.com](#), January 26). It seems that any offensive will be much like the offensives in previous years, which, if successful, will 'mow the lawn' somewhat against ISWAP and Boko Haram. They will not, however, necessarily prevent ISWAP and Boko Haram from another resurgence in one or two years.

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Hefazat-e-Islam Bangladesh's Rivalry with Awami League: The Growing Islamist-Secular Divide

Sudha Ramachandran

Bangladesh is witnessing a surge in Islamist activism and violence. For example, in October and November 2020, the hardline Islamist Hefazat-e-Islam Bangladesh (HIB) led massive demonstrations to protest French President Emmanuel Macron's defense of free speech laws that allow cartoon depictions of the Prophet Mohammed ([Dhaka Tribune](#), November 2, 2020). Weeks later, HIB activists were on the streets again demanding the removal of political statues, which HIB's new leader Junaid Babunagari said were "against the Sharia" ([Bdnews24.com](#), November 28, 2020). Then, on December 5, an under-construction statue of Bangladesh's founding father and first President, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was vandalized by madrassa students in Kushtia, western Bangladesh ([Bdnews24.com](#), December 6, 2020). A statue of anti-colonial fighter Bagha Jatin was damaged soon after ([New Age Bangladesh](#), December 18, 2020).

HIB's heightened activism is partly the outcome of a more hardline Islamist faction wresting control of the group following the death of 104-year-old HIB founder-leader Ahmed Shafi in September 2020. Additionally, Babunagari, who is known to be strongly opposed to Bangladesh's ruling party, the Awami League (AL), has taken over the reins of HIB and is asserting his leadership ([Benar News](#), November 19, 2020). The AL is a secular-in-principle party, which Sheikh Mujibur Rahman founded in 1949 and was at the forefront of Bangladesh's liberation movement. It has been in power in Bangladesh since 2009 and managed to moderate HIB somewhat in recent years.

With Babunagari heading the HIB, a surge in violence can now be expected in Bangladesh. The country is marking the 50th anniversary of independence from Pakistan in 2021 and the AL government will celebrate the

event as a triumph of secular over religious forces. This, however, aggravates Islamist hardliners in HIB.

Rise of Hefazat-e-Islam Bangladesh

An umbrella platform for *ulema* (religious scholars), HIB was established in 2010 in Chittagong ostensibly to defend Islam from AL's allegedly anti-Islamic policies, especially a proposed policy to confer equal inheritance rights to women ([Daily Star](#), December 20, 2020). It shot to prominence in 2013 when it mobilized against surging secular activism in the country. Thousands of secular activists had rallied at Dhaka's Shahbagh Square to demand the execution of Jamaat-e-Islami leaders convicted for war crimes during the 1971 liberation war, and atheist and secular bloggers criticized Islamists for their intolerance.

HIB responded swiftly by issuing a 13-point charter of demands that called for punishing "atheist leaders of Shahbagh, bloggers, and anti-Islamists who make derogatory comments about Prophet Muhammad," as well as the death sentence for blasphemy, mandatory Islamic education at the primary to higher secondary school levels, and a ban on intermixing of men and women ([Daily Star](#), April 6, 2013). HIB further pushed for these demands by mobilizing tens of thousands of madrassa students to participate in marches and rallies ([Outlookindia.com](#), April 6, 2013). The group sought to enforce these demands violently too. At a HIB rally in April 2013, HIB activists severely beat up a female journalist for being present at the all-male event ([New Age Islam](#), October 30, 2013). Then on May 5-6, 2013, it unleashed unprecedented violence in Dhaka's financial district by targeting party offices, private and public property, and vehicles, which led to a police crackdown and subsequent clashes ([Daily Star](#), November 5, 2018).

HIB also played an important role in the silencing of secular activists in Bangladesh and prepared the ground for the terrorism that Islamists unleashed against atheist and secular bloggers between 2013 and 2015. After publicizing a hit-list of secular and atheist bloggers, Shafi denounced them as 'apostates' and declared that killing them was *wajib* (a duty) for Muslims ([Bdnews24.com](#), April 6, 2015; [Daily Observer](#), August 13, 2015). Groups like al-Qaeda affiliated Ansarul Bangla

subsequently killed several activists who figured on this list ([The Hindu](#), September 24, 2015).

Since 2013, HIB has become one of the most influential and powerful of Bangladesh's Islamist groups. Several factors contributed to its rise over this short period of time. One key factor was the decline of the Jamaat-e-Islami. The conviction of several of its leaders on war crimes charges put that party on the defensive and opened space for HIB ([Al Jazeera](#), May 9, 2013).

Awami League's Dilemma

The AL government also facilitated HIB's rise by accepting its demands. In 2013, it arrested some secular activists who HIB wanted punished for their anti-Islamic activities and took measures aimed at silencing criticism of Islamists ([Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses \(IDSA\)](#), December 11, 2020). The AL government also removed content from school textbooks that HIB considered objectionable ([Daily Star](#), January 21, 2017). Further, when HIB demanded the removal of a statue of the Greek goddess Artemis, who symbolizes justice, from the premises of the Supreme Court, the AL government again capitulated and moved the statue out of the public eye ([Scroll](#), May 29, 2017). Ceding to HIB's demands only emboldened HIB as it strove to Islamize Bangladesh.

The street power that HIB displayed during the 2013 protests rattled the AL government, which prompted AL's appeasing of HIB. Moreover, the AL government saw in HIB a useful Islamist ally to counter its political rival, the Islamist-friendly Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). This explains the AL government's "strategic compromise" with HIB, despite HIB's ideology and objectives clashing with its own ([Asia Times](#), December 7, 2018). The AL government's warming ties with HIB initially moderated HIB to an extent and enabled it to even win HIB's backing in the 2018 elections ([DailyO](#), November 19, 2018).

However, since Ahmed Shafi's death in September 2020, HIB has come under the control of a faction that is close to the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami ([Benar News](#), November 19, 2020). Unlike Shafi, who cooperated with the AL government, Babunagari is hostile to it, and under Babunagari's leadership HIB does not seem to be

averse to head-on confrontations with the AL government ([Benar News](#), November 19, 2020 and [IDSA, Issue Briefs](#), December 11, 2020).

Although HIB targeted statues before Babunagari took over HIB leadership, the December 5 attack in Kushtia was different. It was not on a random statue, but on a statue of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who is widely revered as the 'Father of the Nation.' Further, it targeted his statue at a time when the country was marking his birth centenary. Rahman is further the father of Bangladesh's current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. To not respond robustly to the affront to Rahman was simply not an option for the AL government. Not surprisingly then, and especially with anti-AL leaders taking control of the HIB, the AL government responded swiftly and robustly to the Kushtia attack. Babunagari and other HIB leaders whose speeches incited the attack on Rahman's statues have accordingly been charged with sedition ([Dhaka Tribune](#), December 7, 2020).

Collision Ahead

The AL government has said that it is considering reviving probes into 83 cases of HIB "terrorist activities" from 2013 ([South Asia Terrorism Portal](#), December 14, 2020). AL ministers and secular activists are insisting that the installation of Rahman statues will continue ([MBS News](#), November 28, 2020). Meanwhile, Islamist hardliners, including HIB, have threatened bloodshed to prevent the erection of such statues ([Nagorik Barta](#), December 7, 2020). Therefore, although Islamist activism subsided in the weeks following the AL government's pressing of sedition charges against HIB leaders, the lull will likely be temporary. Neither Bangladesh's secular forces nor Islamist hardliners want to be seen as backing down, especially at a time when the country is reliving and remembering the dramatic events of 1970-1971. The stage is set for escalation.

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Turkey Enters Tunisia's Weapons Market With Combat-Proven Arms: A Technical and Strategic Assessment

Can Kasapoglu

In late 2020, Turkey finally secured a lucrative arms sale package to Tunisia after a long period of negotiations. The \$150 million portfolio, which attracted key players of the Turkish defense technological and industrial base, such as Turkish Aerospace Industries (TUSAS) and British Motor Corporation (BMC), will mean more than only defense revenues for Turkey ([TRT Haber](#), December 24, 2020). It will additionally mark Turkish weaponry's entrance into the Tunisian market against the backdrop of Ankara's geopolitical quests in North Africa, which has become a geopolitical flashpoint encompassing various forms of militancy, transnational terrorism, and proxy warfare.

Turkish Arms Sales to Tunisia: Drones First

From a military standpoint, Turkey offers robust and combat-proven solutions to the Tunisian military, which has long been facing significant hybrid threats both in the homeland and emanating from neighboring countries (see [Terrorism Monitor](#), March 1, 2019). As expected, these sales provide a pronounced drone warfare dimension for Tunisia, since drones have recently become Turkey's best-sellers. The Tunisian military will, for example, soon be operating TUSAS-manufactured ANKA-S medium altitude/long endurance (MALE) unmanned aerial systems. ANKA-S, the satellite communications variant of the drone line, comes with extended control range and more resiliency against electronic warfare threats and jammed environments due to the satellite communications (SATCOM) capability.

The platform comes with 24-hours of endurance and approximately 30,000 feet maximum flight altitude. ANKA-S has 250 kilograms of combat payload which enables advanced electronic and signals intelligence systems, such as ISAR (Inverse Synthetic-Aperture Radar) and wide area surveillance cameras, as well as high-pre-

cision munitions ([TUSAS](#), January 25). ANKA-S, along with Baykar's "Pantsir-hunter" Bayraktar TB-2, have played critical roles in Turkey's drone warfare campaigns in Syria over the past few years ([Milliyet](#), March 1, 2020). If used properly, ANKA-S would be tantamount to a force-multiplier for the Tunisian Armed Forces in several aspects, including artillery-drone integration, precision strikes in high-risk areas, and real-time intelligence gathering.

When assessing Turkey's drone exports, it cannot be overlooked that Turkish defense companies do not only produce unmanned aerial systems, but also smart munitions that deliver precision fire-power within limited payloads. Roketsan, Turkey's leading rocket and missile manufacturer, comes into play at this stage. MAM [Smart Micro Munition]-L, for example, is the most widely known among these solutions. Weighing only 22 kilograms, it can be tipped with a several warhead option to strike a broad target set. MAM-L's tandem charge warhead is optimized for penetrating reactive armor, while its thermobaric warhead configuration is optimized for closed and urban settings, and against enemy troop concentrations in defended positions ([Roketsan](#), January 26). Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Turkey-backed Libyan combat formations of the government in Tripoli all used MAM-L and other Roketsan-made smart munitions on various targets under real warfighting conditions, including Russian Pantsir mobile air defenses, Soviet-Russian manufactured main battle tanks, and even mobile Scud launchers, the latter seen with Azerbaijan striking a Scud in the 44-day Nagorno-Karabakh War ([azvision.az.com](#), November 14, 2020).

With the Tunisian military operating ANKA-S, Roketsan will probably dominate Tunisia's smart rocket and missile market. Aselsan, another key player in Turkey's defense sector and an expert producer of electronic systems, is also likely to enjoy a foothold in the Tunisian weapons market by offering high-end sensors equipping unmanned platforms. Together, these systems will enable the Tunisian military to counter asymmetric threats that necessitate time-sensitive surveillance and strike networks optimized for pop-up targets.

Building Tunisia's Next Generation Land Warfare Capacity

Another dimension of Turkey's export package to Tunisia is land warfare. Kirpi (*hedgehog*) mine-resistant and ambush protected (MRAP) vehicles will make their Tunisian debut with the deal. Manufactured by Turkey-based BMC, Kirpi, has been one of the key assets of the Turkish military in the dangerous hybrid battlegrounds of Syria, whose rough terrain was ravaged by land mines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) ([Sabah](#), March 12, 2018). With 4x4 and 6x6 variants, along with a military-ambulance modification, Kirpi's family of land warfare platforms offer STANAG 4569 protection standards, which address a broad-array of threats ([BMC](#), January 25; [Craig International Ballistics](#), January 25). This is of particular importance for Tunisian troops operating in any high IED-risk environment in counter-terrorism missions ([Kapitalis](#), June 8, 2017).

Ejder Yalçın 4x4 armored combat vehicles of Nurol Makina, which is one of Turkey's leading land warfare platform producers, remain another solution that Tunisia will start receiving this year. Ejder Yalçın's largest advantage is its modular design, which can easily be adapted to meet different mission requirements. The vehicle comes with anti-tank and short-range air defense, an armored personnel carrier, and surveillance and border security, radar, electronic warfare, counter-IED and de-mining, and command-and-control configurations ([Nurol Makina](#), January 25).

Just as TUSAS's ANKA-S drone paves the way for Roketsan and Aselsan to capitalize on the first sale to Tunisia, Kirpi and Ejder Yalçın can open new opportunities for the rest of the Turkish defense sector. Simulators for combat platforms loom large at this point. For some time, the Turkish military industry has been working on more realistic vehicle simulations, which would train drivers, weapon systems operators, and even the crew carried by the platform all together ([Anadolu Agency](#), October 2, 2020). Simsoft, a Turkish company focusing on military simulators, comes into the forefront in this arena. Thus, as the Tunisian Army adopts Kirpi and Ejder Yalçın platforms, it is quite possible that Turkish simulator companies – including Simsoft, which is a natural candidate – will find this new market to be compatible.

Lastly, another Turkish land warfare systems producer, Katmerciler, also is in the Tunisian portfolio. At first glance, the company may seem to be offering modest

platforms, tankers, and tank carrier logistical vehicles to the Tunisian Army within the existing package. However, Katmerciler can go an extra mile. In 2020, in cooperation with Aselsan, the company played a large role in Turkey's unmanned ground vehicle (UGV) program by producing robotic combat vehicles. Equipped with Aselsan's SARP (Stabilized Advanced Remote Weapon Platform), the new UGV, which is scheduled to enter into service this year, enjoys modular configuration options ranging from machine guns at 12.7mm and 7.62mm calibers to 40mm grenade launchers ([ASELSAN](#), January 26; [Anadolu Agency](#), July 2, 2020). Although at present it remains a long shot, if Katmerciler manages its ties with the Tunisian defense establishment well, and if the Turkish government capitalizes on its newly established foothold in Tunisia, there is no reason to rule out future robotic ground systems sales. Militarily, UGVs would be expected to operate in high-risk areas for Tunisian combat troops.

The Geopolitics of Turkish Arms Sales in Tunisia

Tunisia has a special role in Turkey's contemporary geopolitical worldview. It is not only a country with an imperial Ottoman legacy, but also a key neighbor of Libya, a potential anchor in the Mediterranean, and an arena where Franco-Turkish competition plays out and Ankara hope to gain an upper hand over Paris. Turkey's arms sales policy is, therefore, not merely about defense transactions and revenues. It is a way to build strategic ties and cement existing ones, as seen previously in Qatari, Azerbaijani, Somali, and Ukrainian examples. After various ups and downs, Turkey is now fulfilling its long-awaited weapons export deals to Tunisia, which will equip the latter with robust warfighting capabilities, especially in hybrid settings. At the same time, the deals provide the Turkish government with a valuable opportunity to capitalize by guaranteeing Turkey's military future in Africa.

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The Jihadists' War in Pakistan after the U.S. Withdrawal from Afghanistan: Lessons From al-Qaeda's Assassination of Benazir Bhutto

Abdul Sayed

The changing narratives and operations of al-Qaeda and its Pakistani ally, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), in recent years indicate that the anti-state jihadist war in Pakistan will not end with a U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 or thereafter ([The News](#), March 1). Recent speeches by the TTP emir, Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud, to a coalition of senior TTP commanders on the future goals of the war in Pakistan is not the only piece of evidence signifying that this war will continue ([Umar Media](#), August 18, 2020; [Umar Media](#), December 15, 2020). Rather, history also shows this war still has a long way to go.

Pakistani Islamists are widely believed to have originally supported al-Qaeda's war against the Pakistani state due to post-9/11 changes in Pakistan's foreign policy, which supported the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan that expelled the Taliban regime from Kabul. However, the anti-state jihadist war in Pakistan is deeply rooted in the pre-9/11 complexities of Pakistani politics, which culminated in Islamists enabling al-Qaeda operations within Pakistan immediately after 9/11. The war against the Pakistani government is so deeply entrenched that it will remain a challenge for the country even if the widely accepted jihad against the U.S. "infidel occupier" in Afghanistan and its allies, including Pakistan, is no longer a factor.

An overlooked illustration of the deep roots of the Islamist war in Pakistan comes from the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, whose thirteenth anniversary was last month. Bhutto's assassination provides indications about how jihadist violence will continue to be a feature in Pakistan even when the country's support to the U.S. in Afghanistan no longer motivates al-Qaeda and TTP militancy. Benazir was the leader of the social-democratic

party, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), when she was assassinated on December 27, 2007 in Rawalpindi, which neighbors the Pakistani capital, Islamabad. She had only returned to Pakistan in October 2007 from self-imposed exile in Britain and Dubai in the hope of becoming Pakistan's prime minister for the third time. A leading figure of Pakistani politics' secular and liberal camp, she was the first major al-Qaeda and TTP target in Pakistan, but hardly the last. [1]

Her high-profile daylight assassination remained controversial for years and led to a blame game between Pakistani politicians, but new evidence related to her murder was released in 2017 in a book on the matter by current TTP emir, Noor Wali Mehsud, which solved several mysteries ([Dawn](#), December 29, 2017). [2] The official final investigation results involving Scotland Yard and a UN team concluded that Osama bin Laden commissioned Benazir's assassination to the TTP founding emir Baitullah Mehsud through Abu Ubaydah al-Masri (the "Egyptian"), who commanded al-Qaeda operations in Pakistan ([Dawn](#), December 28, 2018). The investigation identified different tiers of operators from the chief planner Ibad-ur-Rehman (a.k.a Farooq Chhattan) to suicide bomber assassins, to local facilitators. Mehsud's book added to this understanding by showing that Baitullah Mehsud and TTP's leadership purposely denied their involvement in Benazir's assassination, despite providing planning and operational details not only for the assassination, but also for the previous assassination attempt in Larkana, Sindh Province in October 2007, which killed dozens of her party members.

Bhutto's Early Battles against Islamism, al-Qaeda, and the Military Establishment

Pro-Islamist Pakistani army general, Zia-ul-Haq, ousted Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (ZAB), father of Benazir, through a military coup resulting in ZAB's controversial death sentence in 1979 ([Dawn](#), April 4, 2019). [3] Zia soon became a hero to Pakistani Islamists for the advancement of Islamization processes and central role in supporting the Afghan jihad against Soviet troops in Afghanistan. [4] This brought Zia closer to Islamist political parties, particularly to Jamaat Islami (JI), which held a longstanding ideological and political rival of the socialist ZAB, whose government suppressed their organization in the 1970s.

[5] Benazir, therefore, inherited her father's political legacy, including his conflict with Pakistani Islamists and his fight against the military establishment's dominance over democratically elected governments.

Benazir became the first female prime minister of Pakistan and the first woman to become prime minister of a Muslim majority country after defeating a powerful alliance of Islamist and mainstream political parties in 1988 that were allegedly backed by pro-Zia army generals ([Dawn](#), October 30, 2012). The Islamist parties opposed her both because they considered a female head of state to be against Islamic law and because she was a strong voice against their interpretations of Islam. The Arab jihadists in Pakistan also feared Benazir would obstruct their goals to further Islamize Pakistan and Afghanistan. Bin Laden, through his trusted associates among Pakistani Islamists, financed the 1989 no-confidence motion against Benazir in parliament, which was brought forward by the anti-Benazir political alliance ([Dawn](#), December 24, 2017; [YouTube](#), September 18, 2012). Subsequent evidence suggested a senior officer of the Pakistani intelligence agency, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), who at the time served as ISI's Islamabad station chief, covertly played a central role in this no-confidence motion. This remains a major scandal in Pakistan's political history, known as Operation Midnight Jackal, which resulted in the termination of the involved officer ([Dawn](#), November 27, 2016; [YouTube](#), September 27, 2009).

During Benazir's second term as prime minister came in 1993-1996 (her first being 1988-1990), during which she arrested and extradited dozens of Arab jihadists to their home countries. This policy resulted in the Arab jihadists receiving life imprisonment and death penalties. [6] The remaining Arab jihadists feared that they too would be arrested and fled to Afghanistan, Bosnia, Central Asia, and Sudan. [7] They included senior al-Qaeda cadres, who became al-Qaeda's post-9/11 leaders in Afghanistan and Pakistan, including, for example, Abu Ubaydah al-Masri and Mustafa Abu Yazid, the latter of whom would go on to claim that Benazir's assassination was revenge for her policies against jihadists ([Asia Times](#), December 27, 2007). [8]

In addition, as a result of these extraditions, an al-Qaeda-linked Pakistani jihadist, Ramzi Yousef, organized two attempts to assassinate Benazir, but she survived both times ([The News](#), September 7, 2017). Ramzi also masterminded the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and was the nephew of the 9/11 mastermind, Khalid Shaikh Muhammad. Benazir's government finally arrested Ramzi in February 1995 in Islamabad and quickly extradited him to the United States, where he has since been imprisoned for life. He remains an al-Qaeda hero praised by bin Laden and Aymen al-Zawahiri. [9]

Besides these arrests and extraditions, the Benazir government also implemented controversial laws in 1994 in the Dir division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan that agitated local Islamists. [10] A radical JI splinter group, Tehreek Nifaz-i-Shariat-i-Muhammadi (TNSM), protested these laws through a violent uprising that took control of government buildings and the Saidu Sharif airport ([Dawn](#), November 3, 2007; [Dawn](#), July 12, 2019). [11] This resulted in a Taliban-style movement emerging in the Dir, Bajaur, and Swat areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa led by TNSM emir Sufi Muhammad. [12] His movement coincided with Mullah Umar's rise in Afghanistan, but both movements remained separate and the Benazir government killed and arrested hundreds of TNSM members. [13]

TNSM's two senior-most members after Sufi Muhammad, his son-in-law and successor Maulana Fazlullah and Mulawi Faqir Muhammad, became founding figures of TTP in 2007. The latter became the founding deputy head of TTP and was formerly its central emir in 2013. [14] Faqir Muhammad was the TTP Bajaur chapter emir. Post-9/11, he hosted al-Qaeda leaders in Bajaur, including Aymen al-Zawahiri and Abu Ubaydah al-Masri. [15] Meanwhile, the head planner of Benazir's assassination, Farooq Chhattan, hailed from Swat, and was affiliated with the TTP's Maulana Fazlullah-led "Swati Taliban" ([Dawn](#), October 30, 2012).

Benazir's Second-Term Battles

Benazir's ascension to power for a second term in 1993 resulted in the formation of another radical JI splinter group, Tehreek Islami Pakistan (TIP), which emerged from JI's intellectual class in Islamabad and other Pakistani urban centers ([The Friday Times](#), June 26, 2011).

TIP's hardliners separated from JI in 1994 due to the policies of JI head Qazi Hussain Ahmad. Some of the hardliners even accused him of pursuing a failed strategy that allowed Benazir to become prime minister for a second time one year earlier. [16] Amira Ihsan, a senior TIP member who represented JI in the Pakistani parliament in 1988, now led this charge against JI. A brother of Ihsan, Colonel Muhammad Hamid, was later part of a failed military coup against Benazir in 1995, which was planned by senior army generals and a pro-al-Qaeda veteran Afghan jihadist commander, Qari Saifullah Akhtar ([The Friday Times](#), June 26, 2011).

One of Amira Ihsan's sons, Raja Muhammad Salman (a.k.a. Ustad Ahmad Farooq), also played the primary role in establishing al-Qaeda in Pakistan after 9/11. [17] Ustad Ahmad Farooq became senior advisor to Mustafa Abu Yazid and later led al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) until he was killed in a US drone strike in 2015. [18] Benazir suspected Akhtar of plotting her assassination weeks before her assassination took place ([Geo TV](#), January 10, 2007). Akhtar was consequently arrested for her assassination, but he was released in 2008. He later joined Ustad Ahmad Farooq's al-Qaeda fighters in Waziristan until his death in January 2017 in a U.S. and Afghan joint operation in Ghazni province, Afghanistan. [19]

Besides these enemies, Benazir also faced severe opposition from the anti-Shia Sunni Deobandi sectarian group, Sipahi Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) for her Shia roots. [20] SSP excommunicates all Shia Muslims, demands a totalitarian Sunni state, and has been a major contributor to lethal Shia-Sunni sectarian violence in Pakistan (see [Terrorism Monitor](#), May 5, 2005). SSP's founder, Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, who was known for his firebrand oratory, declared it a religious duty to oust Benazir from power for being Shia. [21] SSP members also facilitated Ramzi Yousef's two assassination attempts on Benazir in the 1990s and its underground splinter, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), which was named after Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, has remained a brutal face of terrorism in Pakistan ([The News](#), September 7, 2017). [22]

In 1990, Jhangvi was assassinated by his Shia sectarian opponents, who were arrested immediately after the murder. His followers considered his killing to be part of

a larger conspiracy organized by influential Pakistani Shia politicians and even Iran. Jhangvi's killing resulted in massive violence in his native district of Jhang and elsewhere in Punjab, which birthed LeJ in 1995. [23] In particular, LeJ also became the main implementer of al-Qaeda and TTP attacks in Pakistan after 9/11. [24] Mustafa Abu Yazid, for example, mentioned that LeJ assisted al-Qaeda in assassinating Benazir when later claiming responsibility for the act ([Asia Times](#), December 27, 2007).

The Red Mosque Operation and Relationship with Musharraf

Although Benazir remained in exile after 9/11, she consistently informed the world about the Islamist and jihadist threat in Pakistan ([Asia Times](#), November 3, 2004). She was also critical of the post-9/11 policies of Pakistani army generals, particularly Pervez Musharraf, specifically their attempts at countering al-Qaeda and its allies, such as TTP, in Pakistan. Her long experience confronting al-Qaeda, Islamists, and rogue elements of Pakistan's military establishment gave her perspective on how to counter the post-9/11 challenge of Islamist militancy in Pakistan.

Although Benazir supported Musharraf's controversial military operation against a pro-al-Qaeda Islamist leader, Abdul Rasheed Ghazi, in Islamabad in July 2007, which killed Ghazi and dozens of followers in the Red Mosque, she doubted the sincerity behind Musharraf and his allies' post-9/11 counterterrorism policies ([Dawn](#), Jul 16, 2007). Other Pakistani political leaders, including Musharraf's allies, meanwhile tried to disassociate themselves from the Red Mosque operation due to fears of severe repercussions from the public and reprisal attacks from jihadists and Islamist militants ([The Express Tribune](#), April 26, 2013). The Red Mosque incident was the boiling point for al-Qaeda and its post-9/11 allied Pakistani jihadists, who quickly declared an open war against the state in revenge for the operation. [25]

The Remaining al-Qaeda and TTP Threat in Pakistan

The sequences of confrontations between Islamists, al-Qaeda, the military establishment, and Benazir from her entry into politics in 1988 until the July 2007 Red Mosque incident and her assassination in December

2007 offer a detailed picture of Pakistani political complexities, which paved the way for post-9/11 pro-al-Qaeda Islamists, including the TTP, to conduct an anti-state jihadist war in Pakistan. The hardliners from the anti-Benazir Islamist groups of the 1990s defected to al-Qaeda and the TTP and played a part in her assassination. Powerful elements of the military establishment who tried to stop Benazir by allegedly supporting Islamist groups who also were considered suspects for their roles in al-Qaeda and the TTP's assassination of Benazir ([UN](#), April 15, 2010; [BBC](#), December 27, 2017).

Although al-Qaeda's and the TTP's official narrative of fighting against the Pakistani state began with their criticism of the Red Mosque incident in 2007 and Pakistan's support of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan after 9/11, they are now focused on the long-term goals of replacing democracy with Sharia and making Pakistan a totalitarian Sunni state. [26] These were the goals for which their predecessors struggled, including JI, TIP, TNSM, SSP and LeJ. This suggests that the anti-state jihadist war will not end with the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan as it is deeply rooted in the complexities of Pakistani politics, which still persist into the future.

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Notes

[1] Syed Salim Shahzad, *Inside al-Qaeda and Taliban: Beyond Bin Laden and 9/11*, (Pluto Press: London, UK, 2011), pp.169

[2] See for details, Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud, *Inqilab-i-Mehsud*, (Mehsuds Revolution) [In Urdu], (Al-Shahab Publishers: Paktika, 2017).

[3] See, for example, Chris Sands and Fazelminallah Qazizai, *Night Letters*, (Hurst Publishers: London, 2019)

[4] In 2011, during the time of the PPP government, the murder case was reopened by the Supreme Court, which declared it a political murder. ZAB was suspected in a murder case of his political opponent, so when Zia came to power, he probed that case against ZAB and

handed down the death penalty to ZAB, even though political opponents of ZAB declared it an unjust decision.

[5] Sands and Qazizai, 2019.

[6] Anne Stenersen, *Al-Qaida in Afghanistan* (Cambridge University Press: United Kingdom, 2017). pp.48

[7] Ibid.

[8] Shahzad, 2011, pp.168-9.

[9] Rabi al-Islami [In Arabic: Islamic Spring], Second Part, As-Sahab Central, 2015. Osama Bin Laden interview with ABC John Miller, ABC News, May 1998. For details on Ramzi Yousef, see, Yosri Fouda and Nick Fielding, *Masterminds of Terror: The Truth Behind the Most Devastating Terrorist Attack the World Has Ever Seen*, (Arcade Publishing: New York, 2004).

[10] Mona Kanwal Sheikh, *Guardians of God: Inside the Religious Mind of the Pakistani Taliban*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2016), pp.80-82.

[11] Ibid

[12] Ibid

[13] Ibid

[14] Mehsud, 2017, pp. 522

[15] Shahzad, 2011. Al-Misri supervised the 7/7 bombings. Bajaur remained stronghold of al-Qaeda shortly after 9/11. It is adjacent to that area of Kunar where OBL was hiding for a year after escaping there from Tora Bora with Aymen Zawahiri, his sons and son in law Abu Suliman Al-Kuwaiti. Zawahiri reportedly twice survived drones there in Bajaur.

[16] Author interview with a senior member of JI, who remained close to Qazi Hussain Ahmad, remotely conducted, October 2, 2020.

[17] Ustad Ahmad Farooq, *Pakistan mi jihad jari rihna chaheay* [In Urdu: Jihad should continue in Pakistan], Hitteen Publications, Oct 2016.

[18] Ustad Ahmad Farooq, "*Shaikh Saeed (Mustafa Abu Yazid)*", *Hitteen*, Issue 9, pp. 117-138

[19] It is mentioned in the Urdu magazine of al-Qaeda by a close aide of Ahmad Farooq, see for details; Moeenuddin Shami, "*With Ustad Farooq: Part 17th*", *Nawai Afghani Jihad* [in Urdu], Vol. 13, Issue 4, pp. 65-66.

[20] See for details, the autobiography of Haq Nawaz Jhangvi successor; Zia ur Rehman Farooqi, *Phir Wahe Qaid o Qafas* (Again the same imprisonment) [In Urdu], (Farooqi Academy: Faisalabad, 1997)

[21] Ibid

[22] Mohammad Amir Rana, *Gateway to Terrorism*, (New Millennium: London, UK, 2003)

[23] See for details, the autobiography of SSP leader; Azam Tariq, *Toot gae zanjeer* (The broken chains) [In Urdu], (Ishat-ul-Maarif: Faisalabad, Sep 2004) 6th:Ed.

[24] Mujahid Hussain, *Punjabi Taliban: Driving Extremism in Pakistan*, (Pentagon Press: New Delhi, India, 2012)

[25] See for details, Shahzad, 2011.

[26] See the detailed essay of the al-Qaeda recruitment and propaganda head in Pakistan, who played a central role in the establishment of the post-9/11 anti-state jihadist war in Pakistan: Ustad Ahmad Farooq, *Pakistan mi jihad jari rihna chaheay* [Urdu: Jihad should continue in Pakistan], *Hitteen Publications*, Oct 2016.