

MILITANT LEADERSHIP MONITOR

Personalities Behind the Insurgency

p.1

Brief

Jacob Zenn

p.2

Muhammad al-Uyghuri:
The New Face of IS
Khorasan's Anti-China
Propaganda

Lucas Webber

p.4

Pakistan's Man in Kabul:
A Profile of the Afghan
Taliban's Interim
Foreign Minister Amir
Khan Muttaqil

Sudha Ramachandran

p.7

In the Name of the
Mahdi: An In-depth
Look at Bangladeshi
Militant and
Propagandist Mushtaq
Arman Khan
Animesh Roul

VOLUME XIII, ISSUE 1 | January 2022

Operation Shujaa Targets Islamic State's Leadership in Congo with Arrests of Salim Mohammed, Benjamin Kisokeranio, and Cheikh Banza

Jacob Zenn

On January 30, Kenya announced it would seek the extradition of Kenyan national Salim Mohammed, who was arrested in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) three days earlier. Although the DRC has not provided details on Mohammed's capture, a photo of him was released after his arrest, with Mohammed appearing disheveled and demoralized (the-star.co.ke, January 30). As a university graduate of Turkey, and a member of Islamic State in Central African Province (ISCAP) in the DRC possessing experience with and ties to militants in Mozambique, Mohammed represents the international orientation of ISCAP ([Militant Leadership Monitor](#), November 2021).

Mohammed's arrest comes on the heels of other arrests of ISCAP leaders and is a counter-terrorism success for the DRC,

Kenya and the region generally. On January 17, for example, Benjamin Kisokeranio was arrested in South Kivu, DRC while he was entering the state from Burundi. His transnational movements, therefore, reflect ISCAP's regionalization (ugnews24.info, January 17). The group's attacks are mostly confined to the DRC and, more recently, Uganda, but its two branches in the DRC and Mozambique evidently have operatives across the region.

The arrest of Kisokeranio is also a key victory in the joint counter-terrorism campaign launched by the Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF) and their counterparts in the DRC (newvision.co.ug, January 15). The campaign commenced after the November 20, 2021 ISCAP bombings in Kampala, and now has a high-level ISCAP leader's arrest to show for its success. Moreover, Kisokeranio's former role as a deputy to the founder of the group's predecessor, Jamil Mukulu, who himself was arrested in Tanzania in 2015, shows that the old guard of jihadism in the DRC is becoming increasingly inactive (observer.ug, April 24, 2015).

Since Kisokeranio's arrest, Operation Shujaa has turned its attention toward Bongela Chuma (real name: Zakaria Banza Souleymane), who is allegedly ISCAP's current leader. Chuma was among the 900 prisoners freed in a prison break by ISCAP's predecessor, Allied Defense Forces (ADF), at the Kangbaya prison in the DRC in 2017 ([securitycouncilreport.org](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org), June 4, 2018). Given that ISCAP's most sophisticated operation was a subsequent prison break executed at the same location that freed 1,200 prisoners in October 2020, Chuma was likely at the helm of its organizational planning ([aljazeera.com](https://www.aljazeera.com), October 20, 2020).

We can believe the claims of Operation Shujaa's leadership that its soldiers are on Chuma's tail. On December 28, 2021, for example, Chuma's own brother, Cheikh Banza Mudjaribu Zakaria Abah Adore (Chiekh Banza), was arrested in Goma, DRC, where he preached at the same mosque as Chuma himself before his arrest in 2017 ([lescoulissesrdc.com](https://www.lescoulissesrdc.com), January 6). Cheikh Banza was still using the mosque to recruit for ISCAP and raise money to send motorcycles to fighters at the group's main bases in the jungles of Beni, DRC.

Prior to the arrests of Mohammed, Kisokeranio, and Cheikh Banza, and the launch of Operation Shujaa, DRC soldiers arrested a Jordanian IS member in September 2021 who arrived in the state to teach ISCAP militants to conduct drone operations, among other skills ([actualite.cd](https://www.actualite.cd), September 22, 2021). The Jordanian's arrest corroborated that ISCAP had established not only communication ties to IS' leadership in the Middle East, but that both entities were affiliated through joint training and logistics activity as well. ISCAP's increasing operational effectiveness, in addition to its continued video and photograph releases through IS' centralized media apparatus', have shown that the Jordanian's arrest was not decisive in stopping the group's progression.

The widening geographic scope of ISCAP operations in the DRC and the group's persistence thus far in spite of arrests indicates that these new arrests alone will not lead to the group's sudden demise. Nevertheless, Operation Shujaa is the most coordinated effort to target ISCAP cells in the DRC to date, and its success should be measured over a longer time frame. Presently, it also appears that ISCAP is no longer viewed regionally as a secondary security concern, but as a top counter-terrorism priority.

Jacob Zenn is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor.

Muhammad al-Uyghuri: The New Face of IS Khorasan's Propaganda Against China

Lucas Webber

On October 8, 2021, an Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) operative detonated a suicide bomb inside of Gozar-e-Sayed Abad Mosque in Kunduz, Afghanistan, reportedly killing more than 50 people and wounding over 100 others ([The Express Tribune](https://www.theexpresstribune.com), October 8, 2021). The attack targeted Shia Muslim worshippers gathered for Friday prayers. Shortly after the blast, Islamic State (IS)'s propaganda organ, Amaq News Agency, published a photo identifying the attacker as "Muhammad al-Uyghuri" and released a statement taking responsibility for the attack.

In addition to the terrible scale of the suicide bombing, the details and comments included in IS' official statements about the attack have important implications. In particular, IS emphasized the suicide bomber's Uyghur ethnicity, leveraging this to criticize the Taliban's relations with China. It was apparent in the organization's initial claim that the militant was an Uyghur given his "al-Uyghuri" *kunya* (*nom de guerre*). This was later confirmed explicitly

in a follow-up statement from Amaq that scorned the Taliban for agreeing to extradite Uyghurs from Afghanistan to China in accordance with Beijing's demands ([Twitter/@colebunzel](#), October 8, 2021). Amaq's statements were then translated into other languages and spread by jihadist media groups, such as al-Qitaal. It is noteworthy that Uyghur jihadists more commonly go by the "al-Turkistani" *kunya*, and it remains undetermined if Muhammad al-Uyghuri is from China's Xinjiang region or if his origins lie in a diaspora community in Central Asia, Turkey, or elsewhere.

Since the attack, the revelation about the perpetrator's Uyghur identity and Amaq's opportunistic exploitation of it to criticize Taliban-China relations, Muhammad al-Uyghuri has become a widely lionized jihadist 'martyr' in the online pro-IS media ecosystem. Although little is known about his personal history, al-Uyghuri has been exalted as a figure to emulate in furtherance of IS' divine cause as well as ISKP's regional objectives.

The Mystique of Muhammad al-Uyghuri

In a way, the lack of biographical detail about Muhammad al-Uyghuri has provided a blank slate for IS to valorize him as an ideal completely unsullied by any troubled personal history. The propagandists celebrating him have capitalized on this, and built him up by frequently sharing photos and edited images of him on pro-IS social media pages and messaging applications. The original statements released by Amaq News Agency were still being recirculated online weeks after the announcement of his death, but it is the pro-IS media groups that have taken the lead in growing his legacy.

Beyond his identity, there are several reasons why he has been celebrated so often and for so long after his death. First, al-Uyghuri set an operational example by clandestinely infiltrating the mosque and avoiding suspicion. Second, once inside, he successfully carried out the attack against

a priority ISKP target in Afghanistan, the Shia Hazara community. Third, he achieved a high death toll, and his actions caused more casualties than any operation since ISKP's August 26, 2021, Kabul Airport suicide bombing. Fourth and finally, his attack undermined Afghan Shia communities' confidence in the Taliban to provide adequate security from predatory ISKP targeting.

In terms of international relations, IS' excoriation of the Taliban for its dealings with China is notable. IS' central leadership and media organs have been explicitly hostile toward Beijing since the formation of the caliphate in 2014 when Abubakr al-Baghdadi, in his infamous "A Message to the Mujahidin and the Muslim Ummah in the Month of Ramadan" audio statement, denounced "the extreme torture and degradation of Muslims in East Turkistan" and condemned China for "preventing" the faithful "from receiving their most basic rights" (Jihadology, July 1, 2014). IS also ended up executing a Chinese national somewhere in Iraq or Syria in 2015, and killing two Chinese teachers in Pakistan in 2017 (Alarabiya News, November 19, 2015 ; Dawn, June 9, 2017).

Out of all the IS branches, ISKP, to which Muhammad al-Uyghuri belonged, is by far the most hawkish when it comes to China (Eurasianet, November 4, 2021). Al-Uyghuri's attack sent a clear message to the Taliban, which is ISKP's most immediate foe, as well as China, which is perceived as a powerful enemy of Islam and the great oppressor of Uyghur Muslims (Militant Wire, October 8, 2021). Al-Azaim Foundation, ISKP's official local media outlet, released a video showing the aftermath of the attack and praised al-Uyghuri as a martyr. It also included visuals of Taliban leaders meeting with Chinese officials. Likewise, the pro-IS Arabic language Talaea Al-Ansar Foundation celebrated al-Uyghuri in one of their own productions.

Muhammad al-Uyghuri's Symbolic Attack on China

The pro-IS media networks in South Asia and official IS propaganda agencies target the Taliban's relations with Beijing to portray the group as an ally to and puppet of China, which the second Amaq statement about al-Uyghuri's attack referenced. These IS media outlets have also played a fundamental role in promoting al-Uyghuri as a heroic figure through the creation and dissemination of visual content online. Pro-IS media groups such as Almarhafat Media, Doat al-Falah, Talaea al-Ansar Foundation, Al-Battar Media, Tafakkur, and others have shared images of him with custom artwork and accompanying text in various languages. Al-Battar Media, for instance, created an image of him superimposed beside a photo of Taliban leaders with a message threatening the new government, notifying them that IS fighters "are lying in wait for you, and we will fight you the same as we fight the rest of the tawaghit."

Shortly after the attack, the pro-IS Hind Province (ISHP) Voice of Hind magazine gloated about the "blessed martyrdom operation carried out in Kunduz" ([Sino Security](#), October 14, 2021). The magazine emphasized how "the blessed operation was carried out by Muhammad al-Uyghuri (May Allah accept him), a knight of Allah from China." It also echoed the claims made by Amaq asserting that "the Taliban had promised the Taghut [Tyrant] China that it will kill and expel all Uyghur Muhajireen [Immigrants] present in Afghanistan," and then added its own angle. It alleged, for example, that "the Taliban had promised to protect and safeguard [Afghanistan's] Buddhist statues" at China's behest.

The veneration of Muhammad al-Uyghuri may also serve a recruitment function given how ISKP often portrays the Taliban as a Pashtun nationalist movement. This contrasts with IS, which presents itself as the only righteous Islamic militant

movement in Afghanistan that transcends ethnic divisions.

Conclusion

IS extols al-Uyghuri as an archetype for ISKP's rank-and-file to follow. He likely will continue to be an inspirational figure within the South Asian IS milieu in order to underscore the level of personal sacrifice required for the group to further its cause in Afghanistan. At the same time, his *kunya* is a reminder to China that ISKP has Uyghur fighters who can be used to target its interests in Afghanistan or Pakistan, if not also in China itself.

Lucas Webber is a researcher focused on geopolitics and violent non-state actors. He is cofounder and editor at militantwire.com.

Pakistan's Man in Kabul: A Profile of the Afghan Taliban's Interim Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi

Sudha Ramachandran

On January 23-25, a Taliban delegation met with Western diplomats and activists in Oslo. While the Norwegian government stressed that the meetings were not "legitimation or recognition of the Taliban," the Taliban described the talks as "a step to legitimize" their rule ([Economic Times](#), January 24). Interim Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, who led the Taliban delegation, stated the meetings were "an achievement in itself because we shared the stage with the world. From these meetings we are sure of getting support for Afghanistan's humanitarian, health, and education sectors." After the talks ended, Muttaqi claimed that they "went well" ([Gulf Today](#), January 26).

Since Muttaqi took charge of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in September last year, he has been at the forefront of the Taliban's

engagement with the international community. He has been the most visible of all the Taliban ministers, and has made official visits to several countries, including Pakistan, Iran and Turkmenistan. In addition, he met with Russian and Chinese envoys in Kabul, engaged in talks with American and European Union officials, and participated in the Organization of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) foreign ministers meeting on Afghanistan in Islamabad, Pakistan. During a visit to Iran in January, Muttaqi further met with key Afghan opposition leaders, including Ahmad Massoud, who heads the National Resistance Front, and Ismail Khan, a former Afghan minister and provincial governor (tolonews.com, January 10).

Muttaqi's appointment as the Taliban interim foreign minister last year came as a surprise. There were others, like Abdul Ghani Baradar and Sher Mohammed Abbas Stanekzai, who were perhaps more qualified for the post. This raises the question: who is Amir Khan Muttaqi, and what gives him clout in the Taliban?

Muttaqi's Rapid Rise in the Taliban

Muttaqi's family was originally from Paktia but moved to Helmand province, and it was in Zarghun village that Muttaqi, who belongs to the Sulaimankhel subgroup of the Pashtun Ghilzai tribe, was born in 1971. His primary education was at a village mosque and school there. However, Muttaqi moved to Pakistan with his family when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, and continued his religious studies there until he subsequently joined the anti-Soviet jihad (Afghanistan Analysts Network, September 21, 2020).

He enlisted in the Harakat-i-Inqilab-i-Islami and was a security guard outside the house of its founder-chief, Maulvi Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi. [1] Amid the bitter infighting that broke out among the various mujahideen groups in the early 1990s, Muttaqi joined the newly established Taliban along with many of the

Harakat-i-Inqilab-i-Islami fighters, who later formed the core fighting cadre of the Taliban. This played an important role in Muttaqi's swift rise in the Taliban (Afghanistan Analysts Network, June 22, 2016).

When the Taliban captured Kandahar city in November 1994, Muttaqi, then a member of its High Council, was appointed manager of Kandahar Voice of Shariat Radio. In June-July of the following year, he became Director of Kandahar's Department for Information and Culture (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 30). This would pave the way to his further rise in the Taliban hierarchy.

In the First Taliban Ruling Period and Afterwards

After the Taliban captured power in Kabul in September 1996, Muttaqi was appointed Minister of Information and Culture, a post he held throughout the first Taliban regime while also functioning as the Taliban spokesman. In 1999, he was appointed the chief of staff of the Taliban's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and was subsequently appointed as the Minister of Education. Muttaqi also participated in negotiations with the Northern Alliance at Tashkent, Ashgabat and Jeddah (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 30). On January 25, 2001, Muttaqi was also included in the United Nations Sanctions List for his participation in the Taliban regime's "acts and activities" (United Nations Security Council).

With the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan and the ouster of the Taliban in November 2001, Muttaqi, like other Taliban leaders, relocated to Pakistan. In addition to heading the Taliban's Cultural Commission, he was in charge of the group's propaganda activities. He set up "a systematic jihadist publication apparatus" and "played a key role in enlightening the minds [of people] about jihad" and countering "the enemy's [U.S.] propaganda aggression" (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

[Affairs](#), January 30). However, his propaganda machinery was used not only to disseminate Taliban ideology and positions, but also to promote his own interests. Muttaqi, for example, engaged in “character assassination of his rivals and others in the Taliban” and reportedly maligned other leaders to weaken and undermine them. Taliban leaders were, therefore, wary of him. [2]

Likewise, Muttaqi used the Taliban’s propaganda publications to promote those he supported. This was the case with Mullah Mohammed Mansur, who succeeded Taliban founder-chief, Mullah Mohammed Omar. Muttaqi’s supporters and detractors alike admit that Muttaqi “very effectively, helped engineer the [rather controversial] succession process in favor of Mansur.” Indeed, he is regarded as “the kingmaker.” A part of the reason for Mansur’s “success in subsequently consolidating power lay in Muttaqi’s relentless pro-Mansur campaign in the Taliban media.” He then played a similar role in helping Mansur’s successor, the Taliban’s current emir Haibatullah Akhundzada, consolidate his hold over the group ([Afghanistan Analysts Network](#), June 22, 2016).

Appointment as Foreign Minister

Muttaqi is a member of the Rahbari Shura, the Taliban’s leadership council, and was Akhundzada’s chief of staff. He was also part of the Taliban team that negotiated with the U.S. in Doha, Qatar. He, therefore, was able to play an important role in the negotiations with Afghan government leaders in the run-up to and after the Taliban’s capture of Kabul on August 15, 2021. Apparently, he was engaging in talks with former President Hamid Karzai and the Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation Abdullah Abdullah even before the Taliban entered Kabul ([Times of India](#), August 17, 2021). The talks, which were aimed at bringing non-Taliban leaders into the new government, continued for some days after the Taliban captured Kabul

but then failed, given the Taliban’s reluctance to include non-Taliban leaders.

On September 7, 2021, Muttaqi was appointed interim foreign minister of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, which is the Taliban’s self-given formal name. Sher Mohammed Abbas Stanekzai was widely expected to head the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, given the important role it would play in dealing with the international community. However, he was appointed as Muttaqi’s deputy ([Tolo News](#), September 7, 2021).

A relatively moderate pragmatist, Stanekzai had been the deputy head of the Taliban’s Political Office in Qatar, was featured prominently in the negotiations with the U.S. and led several Taliban delegations to countries like Russia, China and Pakistan. Yet, it was Muttaqi who was appointed interim foreign minister. Moreover, Muttaqi and Stanekzai do not get along well with each other, which means Muttaqi’s appointment was not received well by Stanekzai, who is reported to have stayed away from the office for several months after the appointments were made. [3]

Clout in the Taliban

Muttaqi does not belong to any particular faction in the Taliban, but has taken care to maintain relations with all factions and sides. [4] He is described as “a shrewd operator who has strategically positioned himself within the [Taliban] oligarchy” ([Afghanistan Analysts Network](#), June 22, 2016). Further, he is reportedly “very corrupt” and is known in Taliban circles to be a “powerful business tycoon.” Muttaqi has “large business interests” in Pakistan and “owns vast real estate properties in that country,” including in Karachi and the upper-class gated community of Bahria Town in Islamabad. Importantly, several of his businesses are in partnership with military officials. [5]

Muttaqi’s clout in the Taliban comes from his capacity to make and break Taliban

leaders with his character assassination campaigns. However, more important to his rise in the Taliban has been Pakistan's backing. He is known to be "very close" to the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan's intelligence wing. [6]

Muttaqi was, for example, not part of the Taliban negotiation team in 2018, but Pakistan pushed him to be included, and even put him on an airplane to Dubai. However, Taliban leader Akhundzada removed him, and he was forced to return to Pakistan. Muttaqi was "jobless" thereafter, but managed to return to the negotiating team. [7] During the negotiations with the U.S. in 2019, Muttaqi's control over Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, who headed the negotiating team, then became apparent. According to an Afghan researcher, Muttaqi would "send slips of paper with instructions to Baradar during the talks, on what he should say or not say. He would openly rein him in." [8]

Conclusion

Among Taliban leaders, Muttaqi's notable characteristic in terms of foreign policy is his proximity to Pakistan. Should he go against Pakistan's interest on Afghanistan-Pakistan issues, such as the conflict over the Durand Line and its fencing as well as the Taliban's support to Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (Pakistani Taliban), Pakistan would have leverage over Muttaqi. It would deny him control over the business empire he has built in Pakistan. Consequently, Muttaqi is unlikely to stray from his long-standing position of support to Pakistan, and Pakistan is likely to have some sway over the Taliban's foreign policy.

Dr. Sudha Ramachandran is an independent researcher and journalist based in Bangalore, India. She has written extensively on South Asian peace and conflict, political and security issues for The Diplomat, Asia Times and Geopolitics.

Notes:

[1] Author's Interview, Afghan journalist, who wished to remain anonymous for security reasons; interviewed on January 26, 2022.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Author's Interview, Afghan researcher formerly in Kabul; interviewed on January 27, 2022.

[5] Afghan journalist, n.1.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Afghan researcher, n.3.

In the Name of Mahdi: An In-depth Look at Bangladeshi Militant and Apocalypse Propagandist Mushtaq Arman Khan

Animesh Roul

In early May 2020, the Bangladeshi police counter-terrorism unit arrested 17 members of the banned terrorist group, Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), in Dhaka. At the time of the arrest, the JMB operatives planned to join Imam Mahdi, the spiritual redeemer of Islam, in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The detained militants had been taking shelter in Dhaka's Kakrail Mosque in disguise as Tablighi Jamaat members, and acknowledged that seven others among them had already left the country for Saudi Arabia at different times to become soldiers of Imam Mahdi ([Business Standard](#), May 5, 2020).

The self-proclaimed "Imam Mahdi" was identified as Mushtaq Arman Khan, a Bangladeshi expatriate in Saudi Arabia who spread Islamist propaganda through social media channels ([YouTube](#), February 10, 2020). He lamented through his online speeches and writing about the arrests of his followers by the Bangladeshi authorities. Earlier, in January 2020, four students of Bangladesh Agricultural

University in Mymensingh travelled to Saudi Arabia on the pretext of performing *Umrah* (Islamic pilgrimage), and reportedly pledged allegiance and joined Khan as his followers (Daily Star, May 06, 2020).

A deputy commissioner of Bangladesh's elite Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit, who was in charge of the case, revealed to the media that these JMB members, and others who have already joined Khan, were inspired by their leader's audio-visual propaganda on social media. These lectures are primarily focused on theological themes, such as Islamic jihad (holy war), Dajjal (false Prophethood), Ghazwat- ul-Hind (the final battle of India) and other eschatological narratives, such as the Day of Judgment (Daily Ittefaq, August 23, 2020; YouTube, November 8, 2020). This profile examines how Khan exploited the COVID-19 pandemic to peddle jihadist and doomsday narratives in the Indian subcontinent and beyond through his widespread social media presence.

Tablighi Jamaat, JMB, and COVID-19 in Khan's Narratives

Mushtaq Arman Khan, who claims to be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, garnered support and followers in Bangladesh during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic through his statements about the disease, the end of the world, and the arrival of Imam Mahdi. A cursory look at his website suggests that some have already pledged support to Khan as Imam Mahdi. In October 2020, for example, Bangladeshi police arrested Sirajul Islam, a chartered accountant by profession from the Badda area of capital Dhaka, for disseminating Khan's teachings in Bangladesh and inspiring people to pledge support to him, the self-proclaimed Imam Mahdi (New Age, October 21, 2020).

Not much is known, however, about Khan's childhood and early education. His website claims that he was born and educated in Netrokona in northern Bangladesh. [1] In

2006, Khan graduated from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology in his early 40s. After completing his degree in electrical and electronic engineering, he studied architecture in Malaysia. Despite his mainstream technical background, he took a keen interest in studying Islam. In 2016, he travelled to Uganda on a religious preaching tour along with his followers. It appears that he led a Tablighi Jamaat preaching party to the African country. Two years later, in 2018, he travelled to Saudi Arabia and declared himself as Imam Mahdi (Daily Newline, August 23, 2020).

Khan claims through his YouTube and Facebook messages that a single night's dream changed the course of his life by transforming him from an ordinary Muslim to God's "chosen one." However, he gives credit to Tablighi Jamaat, the transnational ultra-conservative proselytizing group borne out of the larger Deoband movement of India, for his new religious bent of mind, lifestyle and ideology. His inclination towards religion increased manifold, and he became a devout Muslim after attending Tablighi Jamaat's biggest world conclave (Biswa Ijtema) in Tongi, Bangladesh during his college years. The Tongi event is an annual three-day congregation that attracts millions of Muslims every year from all over the world. Not surprisingly, Khan's propaganda messages centered around Tongi. He highlighted in his messages how the next Imam Mahdi (himself) would come from a country east of Medina, and indicated that place as Tongi in his propaganda talks and literature. He draws several parallels between Mecca and Tong, including that these places are famous for annual Muslim religious congregations, such as *Hajj* and *Ijtema* ("congregation"). [2]

In Bangladesh, various militant group members often take refuge or masquerade as members of Tablighi Jamaat to evade scrutiny. Although it is not categorized as a banned group, it is accused of sheltering and nurturing extremist elements under the garb of pious preachers or Islamic

mendicants ([Hindustan Times](#), May 31, 2019; [Dhaka Times](#), September 18, 2021). The arrested JMB members were captured on their way to Saudi Arabia while attempting to travel under the guise of the Tablighi Jamaat preaching team. During their interrogation, the militants reiterated Khan's doomsday predictions and apocalyptic religious-based concerns about COVID-19's spread and future calamities. In his audio-visual messages, Khan likewise claims the COVID-19 pandemic, earthquakes, and locust swarms in early 2020 were signs of the coming of Imam Mahdi.

The arrested JMB members also believed, as per the prophecies spread by Khan, that "The sun would not rise for the next 40 days, the sky would be covered with smoke, the infidels would all die, but the believers would have only a light coughing." Further, the JMB members reportedly believed that the COVID-19 pandemic would "bring down wrath from the skies, smoldering everything, leaving no guards at the Bangladesh-India borders" ([Facebook](#), February 22, 2020). Arrested militants admitted their plan to leave the country through the India-Bangladesh borders near Satkhira and Benapole to reach Kashmir before travelling to Saudi Arabia in the guise of members of Tablighi Jamaat. They were convinced the poor security along the international borders due to COVID-19 would allow them to sneak past border guards ([Bangladesh Post](#), May 5, 2020).

Khan's Proclamations on Ghazwat-ul Hind, Dajjal, and the End of the World

Khan claimed to be the "promised leader for mankind" and believed he was "destined to fight back against evil entities of the world," including in the mythical Ghazwat Hind ("Battle of India"), referring to the final battle between the Muslims and the polytheists (Hindus) for the Indian subcontinent. He urged Muslims worldwide to enter Mecca in Saudi Arabia to join the fight against infidels and be among the coveted 313 mujahideen companions of

Imam Mahdi, who take the oath of allegiance to him ([Desh Rupantor](#), March 31, 2020). According to Khan, no Hindus will survive after the Battle of India, which will be the most horrific war in the history of mankind, causing the deaths of one-third of the world's population. He also claimed that all the Jews would be killed with the end of Dajjal, and warned about natural disasters and the destruction of the United States and Israel after the invasion of Jerusalem. [3]

It appears from Khan's speeches and writings that he also believed in secret societies like the Illuminati and Bilderberg. He explained how these associations teamed up with the Dajjal against Islam to kill innocent Muslims in Syria, Palestine, India, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen and Myanmar. These radical and apocalyptic views notwithstanding, his speeches are often laced with Islamic concepts of life and death, and remind Muslims around the world to be true Muslims. Consistent with Tablighi Jamaat's worldview, he urged Muslims to follow the basic tenets of Islam, renounce worldly possessions, and help fellow Muslims. Interestingly, in his effort to inspire the Indian subcontinent's Muslims, Khan further invited famous Indian Muslim movie stars, such as Salman Khan, Sharukh Khan, Saif Ali Khan and Amir Khan, to visit Mecca. He additionally urged them to help fellow Muslims of the region and renounce their luxurious lifestyles to become true and devout Muslims. [4]

Khan's Arrest and Future

In August 2020, the CTTC lodged a case against Khan under the Digital Security Act (2018) for religious misinterpretations, apocalyptic narratives, and the spreading of provocative statements on virtual platforms. Bangladeshi authorities had informed the Saudi government and Interpol about the controversial preacher, and briefed them about his propaganda and misinformation activities through social media channels. According to one of his followers, the Saudi authorities arrested

him in late December 2020 ([YouTube](#), January 13). As per Khan's earlier prophecies about possible Saudi-Bangladesh actions, his followers are hopeful and waiting for his safe release.

Conclusion

No clarity exists concerning his arrest or deportation from the Bangladeshi government thus far. It may be possible that cases like this have partly influenced the Saudi government to restrict Tablighi Jamaat and similar groups that have recently begun operating in the Kingdom ([Twitter](#), December 6, 2021). However, despite Khan's reported arrest in Saudi Arabia, his propaganda, videos and other materials are still available on his active Facebook page and YouTube channels, which continue to spread his unusual ideology.

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.

Notes

- [1] Mushtaq Arman Khan, "The Holy Messenger of Allah", November 16, 2020, <https://www.caliphatullah.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/The-Holy-Messenger-of-Allah-.pdf>.
- [2] Khan, "Letter to Ummah", November 16, 2020, <http://caliphatullah.com/index.php?view=post&id=633>.
- [3] Khan, "Birth & Death of Islam", https://drive.google.com/file/d/1stLOiW6W7mEiRxNdILu8UpGAX-M_drPm/view.
- [4] Khan, "Letter to Amir Khan", <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NewRkbFKBLoRay5QBgA3HGRLC3MovcUq/view>.