



# MILITANT LEADERSHIP MONITOR

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#### **Will Anas Abdulrahman Lead Ethnic Malay Muslim Militants to Peace with Thailand?**

Jacob Zenn

On the eve of Ramadan, the spokesperson for the Barisan Revolutionary National (BRN) rebels, Anas Abdulrahman (also known as Hipni Mareh), announced that his militant group would halt attacks in Thailand throughout Ramadan, which lasts from April 3 to May 14 ([pikiran-rakyat.com](http://pikiran-rakyat.com), April 2). The Thai military accordingly promised not to conduct any operations to arrest or kill BRN members during Ramadan. Abdulrahman stated such “confidence-building measures” could end up leading to a long-term peace treaty between the BRN and Thailand. This was thus an important step toward peace, one which occurred in the fourth round of negotiations between the parties held outside of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Considering how secretive and unavailable the BRN is to the outside world, including national and international press, any of Abdulrahman’s words, let alone ones of confidence about peace, set an optimistic

tone regarding the possibilities of ebbing the tide of conflict in southern Thailand ([reliefweb.int](http://reliefweb.int), November 8, 2019). Abdulrahman himself is from southern Thailand’s Yala Province, which borders Malaysia and is the epicenter of the insurgency of the Thai Muslim ethnic Malays, who seek greater autonomy or independence from Thailand. Before becoming the BRN spokesperson, he had also been a teacher at the Thamvitya Muliniti School in Yala, which is the largest private Islamic school in Thailand ([crisisgroup.com](http://crisisgroup.com), April 19). This provided him credentials to become a BRN political affairs head and later spokesperson as he networked among youths and, therefore, prospective militants ([benarnews.org](http://benarnews.org), January 21, 2020).

However, Abdulrahman has historically sought “confidence-building measures” with the Thai government only to see negotiations fail. In January 2020, for example, he noted in the first round of peace talks with the Thai government that both parties needed to find common ground before any success could be seen. Further, he “thanked God” for bringing both parties to the table and asserted that

“confidence building between both sides” was needed to avoid the futile back-channel negotiations that had occurred previously ([benarnews.org](http://benarnews.org), January 21, 2020).

Recent hopes of peace were disrupted when, on January 3, 2022, BRN claimed responsibility for bombs that damaged power posts and a mobile phone signal tower and caused blackouts in southern Thailand ([ucanews.com](http://ucanews.com), January 5). According to the BRN claim, its “warriors of a new generation” would end Thai rule over the country’s majority Muslim ethnic Malay provinces. Nevertheless, there were questions around whether the BRN faction allied with Anas Abdulrahman ordered those attacks. Only ten days earlier, for example, Abdulrahman stated that the BRN “always respects international humanitarian law” and gave no indication the BRN would soon undertake a series of attacks after the New Year. He also criticized Thailand for refusing to acknowledge there was a “conflict,” which he alleged the Thai government did to avoid internationalizing the issue ([nikkei.com](http://nikkei.com), December 23, 2021).

Despite the January 3 bombing and another attack that killed 15 people in southern Thailand in November 2019, peace talks have not been fully derailed, with no small contribution from Anas Abdulrahman’s promise of a ceasefire during Ramadan ([aljazeera.com](http://aljazeera.com), November 6, 2019). The current ceasefire also followed a period of reduced contact between Abdulrahman and Thai officials caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, when only lower level functionaries were negotiating between the BRN and the Thai government ([nikkei.com](http://nikkei.com), December 23, 2021). Abdulrahman also promised during COVID-19 that although there was no formal “ceasefire” with the Thai government, the BRN would “stop carrying out attacks unless the BRN is attacked and we have to defend ourselves” ([malaymail.com](http://malaymail.com), January 22).”

Abdulrahman has proven to be a pragmatic BRN spokesperson, who is consistently willing to engage Thai authorities in negotiations, notwithstanding concurrent low-level attacks by the BRN and more violent attacks by other anti-Thai ethnic Malay Muslim rebels who appear to be outside BRN control ([bangkokpost.com](http://bangkokpost.com), April 16). At the same time, the start-and-stop negotiations are yet to lead to long-term, tangible results and the BRN’s demand for autonomy or independence continues to be rebuffed. Thus, for now Abdulrahman still holds power for being a potential arbiter of peace, but if he fails to secure BRN goals or achieve a long-term ceasefire, it could lead to the empowering of more radical and violent groups that will reject Abdulrahman’s and the BRN’s claims to represent ethnic Malay Muslims in southern Thailand altogether.

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## **Muslim Dost: The IS Khorasan Defector to the Taliban and Alleged Ex-Afghan Intelligence Stooge**

*Abdul Sayed*

Abdul Rahim Muslim Dost, a founding member of Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP), surrendered to the Afghan Taliban on March 4 and pledged allegiance to the group’s emir, Hibatullah Akhundzada ([Twitter/Ab. Sayed](https://twitter.com/Ab_Sayed), March 4). Dost appeared on March 4 in the capital city of eastern Afghanistan’s Nangarhar province, where he spoke to the media after addressing a gathering at the Taliban intelligence provincial directorate. At that time, he declared his allegiance to the Taliban for the purpose of the development, peace, and prosperity of the Afghan nation and declared ISKP a deviant group with an anti-Afghanistan agenda. He termed ISKP as *khawarij* (outside the fold of Islam) and accused it of being involved

in extreme brutalities. He further called on ISKP members to join the Afghan Taliban for the greater interest of Afghanistan and admitted his support for ISKP was the biggest mistake of his life.

The gathering where Dost renounced ISKP was attended by the Taliban provincial intelligence chief, Dr. Bashir. Both Dost and Bashir hail from the same district of Nangarhar -- Kot. Nangarhar was the traditional stronghold of ISKP and the group's headquarters for five years after the founding of ISKP in early 2015 (Kot is one of the eight districts in Nangarhar that had a strong ISKP presence). [1] Since Dost's betrayal of ISKP, he has become its arch-enemy because he represents a win for the Taliban in its rivalry with ISKP.

### **Dost's First Interview**

Dost is a prominent Afghan Salafist scholar who has had influential roles in the Afghanistan and Pakistan militant landscape since 9/11 ([Militant Leadership Monitor](#), February 2021). He was also the first Afghan jihadist to pledge loyalty to the Islamic State (IS) caliph, Abubakar al-Baghdadi, within 48 hours of his self-declared Caliphate announcement in 2014 ([Archives](#), July 10, 2014). Within months of ISKP's establishment, however, Dost parted ways with the group and became its top critic ([Nun Asia](#), October 21, 2015). Since then, he has publicly criticized the group and alleged it was infiltrated by Pakistani intelligence to destabilize Afghanistan. The same anti-Pakistan rhetoric dominated Dost's narratives in his interaction with the media after he pledged allegiance to the Taliban on March 4 ([Shahmshad TV](#), March 7).

Dost held a detailed interview with an Afghan television channel on March 7, where he spoke at length about his jihadist life, falling out with ISKP, and allegiance to the Taliban ([Shahmshad TV](#), March 7th). He claims he parted ways with ISKP "within a month" when he realized the group was infiltrated by Pakistan intelligence agents

and worked at their direction to create bloodshed and instability in Afghanistan.

Due to his open criticism of ISKP, Dost claimed that IS assassinated three of his nephews and a cousin and that ISKP would hunt him until the end. He further claimed ISKP abducted his two sons from Kabul eight days before the Taliban takeover in August 2021. Both of them dramatically escaped ISKP captivity, but one was fatally wounded.

### **ISKP's Reaction to Dost's Critiques**

ISKP quickly reacted to Dost's pledge of loyalty to the Taliban and his criticism of the group. Dost's announcement coincided with an ISKP terrorist attack in Peshawar, a north-western provincial capital of Pakistan. The attack targeted a Shia Muslim mosque during Friday prayers and resulted in over 250 injured and 67 casualties ([The News](#), March 13). The 28-page ISKP statement released on March 10 to claim this attack also criticized Dost for his allegiance to the Taliban and his remarks against ISKP. [2] The statement called Dost a greedy journalist disguised in the cloak of a "mullah and shaykh."

ISKP challenged Dost's claims of limiting its war only to Afghanistan on the Pakistani intelligence's direction and blatant lies and stated that ISKP has conducted a parallel war in Pakistan since its emergence in 2015 whose latest example is the recent attack in Peshawar. ISKP asserted that the group's fight against Pakistan is evident to all and alleged Dost now himself has become an indirect stooge of the Pakistani intelligence with his joining the Afghan Taliban. In fact, ISKP claims the Taliban are the real Pakistani stooges.

The most detailed ISKP bashing of Dost so far has been a 32-page critique penned by the prominent ISKP writer, Abu Musab Sharqawi, on March 5. [3] Sharqawi wrote that Dost was a former Afghan intelligence National Directorate of Security (NDS) agent planted in ISKP who tried to take control of ISKP leadership. He further

accused Dost of attempting to sow the seeds of discord in the group by enflaming Hanafist-Salafist sectarian and Afghan-Pakistan nationalist divisions and hoping that doing so would lead him to ISKP's top leadership position. He also called Dost a "nationalist apostate," who wished to use ISKP for violence in Pakistan at the behest of Pakistan's rivals, namely the Afghan and Indian intelligence agencies. He added that Dost blames ISKP for being a Pakistani intelligence project, but that Dost himself fell into the lap of the same intelligence agency by joining the Taliban. In this way, Sharqawi repeats the ISKP's standard anti-Taliban narratives by labeling him as a Pakistani stooge.

## Conclusion

It is significant that Dost repeatedly claimed the same charges against ISKP that were attributed to him after he publicly announced his rebellion against ISKP in October 2015. This was the first time ISKP published such an in-depth reaction to Dost's charges against the group. ISKP's al-Azaim media already had published a document in August 2021 containing a few sentences on Dost that called him "a nationalist apostate" working for the former Afghan intelligence agency in joint covert projects funded by Saudi and Indian intelligence. [4] However, ISKP's breaking its silence on Dost may indicate a newfound fear that his allegiance to the Taliban will inspire former ISKP members to follow his example while ISKP struggles to mobilize its own fighters for war against the new rulers of Afghanistan, namely the Taliban.

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## References:

[1] Abu Saad Muhammad al-Khurasani, "Bright pages for understanding the nationalist Taliban," al-Azaim Foundation, August 2021.

[2] "Glad tidings to Peshawar", al-Azaim Foundation, March 9, 2022.

[3] Abu Musab Sharqawi, "Muslim Dost or Murtad (apostate) Dost?", Iqra media, March 5, 2022.

[4] Abdul Qahar, "Pugwash organization", al-Azaim Foundation, August 31, 2021.

## Menandro "Ka Bok" Villanueva's 50-Year Career as a Philippine Communist Guerilla

*Lucas Webber*

On January 5, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) killed most wanted rebel Menandro "Ka Bok" Villanueva, who was one of the country's longest-active Communist insurgents and was involved in one of the world's longest-running insurgencies ([Manila Times](#), January 7). Ka Bok was killed by government forces in Mabini Town, Davao de Oro, which coincidentally is a municipality named after Filipino revolutionary hero, Apolinario Mabini, a historical figure who advocated for independence from Spanish rule ([Davao Today](#), January 12). The death of Ka Bok marks the latest loss of the old guard core of the Philippine armed Communist resistance movement following an AFP operation that killed the infamous Ka Oris in late October 2021 ([Manila Bulletin](#), November 1, 2021).

## Ka Bok's Legacy

Ka Bok was approximately 70 years old when he was killed and had served in the Communist insurgent ranks for over 50 years, making him one of the small handful of still-active veterans remaining in the movement ([PRWC](#), January 12). He was a founding member of the New People's Army (NPA), having connected with the group in the 1970s as a student activist at the Philippine Science High School and then through Kabataang Makabayan (KM), an underground socialist youth organization

([Rappler](#), January 13; [PTV News](#), January 8). He had climbed the NPA's organizational ranks to become a top commander and highly respected leader ([CPP](#), January 13).

The high level of reverence Ka Bok had earned through his service to the NPA was expressed when NPA spokesman Marco Valbuena put out the rare call for "all revolutionary forces and commands all Red fighters to give [Ka Bok] the firmest Red salute" ([PRWC](#), January 12). Valbuena celebrated the life and deeds of Ka Bok and eulogized his "selflessly serving the Filipino people's revolutionary cause," including becoming "among the legion of heroes of the Filipino people", and "performed crucial tasks in the national growth of the NPA as its head commander" ([PRWC](#), January 12, 2022). Adding some clarity to exactly what roles Ka Bok played, Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founder Jose Maria Sison officially confirmed that he was a "member of the Central Committee and Political Bureau of the Communist Party of the Philippines, National Commander of the New People's Army and secretary of the Mindanao Commission" ([CPP](#), January 13).

Speaking to his character and operational security diligence, Sison stated that Ka Bok was "a highly resolute, intelligent, diligent and effective cadre" and "was so humble and self-effacing that the enemy was unable to get a photo of him for a long time until his capture" ([CPP](#), January 13). There is some indication that the latter detail is accurate as his "most wanted" poster included only a sketch and no actual photographs ([SunStar](#), December 28, 2021). Although Ka Bok maintained a reserved demeanor and low profile, in contrast to the late similarly-long serving comrade Jorge "Ka Oris" Madlos, his death nonetheless reverberated throughout the international socialist and Communist movement, including eliciting statements of respect from groups, such as the Turkish militant Yeni Demokrasi (the legal wing of Liberation Army of the Workers and Peasants of Turkey or TIKKO) and the Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist-

Leninist (TKP-ML), French La Cause du Peuple (The Cause of the People), the prominent militant communist Red Spark website, and Anti Imperialist Action Ireland, among others ([Twitter](#)/@TKPML2, January 14; [Twitter](#)/@YDemokrasi11, January 21). Individual online supporters expressed their condolences as well, with one Maoist from Waterford, Ireland even posting a photo of a spray painted message reading "RIP Ka Bok" ([Twitter](#)/@MaoismIreland, January 18).

Losing a veteran as seasoned as Ka Bok is undoubtedly a significant blow to the NPA (military wing), as openly admitted by the CPP (political structure connected with the NPA), insofar as Ka Bok brought five decades of experience and wisdom to the insurgency ([PRWC](#), January 12). He was a force multiplier in the purest sense as he had trained "a number of Party cadres and NPA commanders, veterans in people's war, as well as young leaders" who the CPP claim to be well "primed to take his place and perform his duties" ([PRWC](#), January 12, 2022). However, it is doubtful the NPA has any true 1 to 1 replacement for a legendary fighter with the pedigree of Ka Bok.

### **Information War Over Ka Bok's Death**

There is a consistent pattern that unfolds following AFP operations that kill high profile Communist insurgent leaders: the government frames the "elimination" of said figures as the application of justice, while the Communists accuse Manila of extra-judicial killings. This trend was discernible following the military operation that killed Ka Oris. For example, the CPP alleged that he was unarmed and travelling to seek medical treatment when he was executed in cold blood by the AFP ([PRWC](#), October 31, 2021).

In the case of Ka Bok, the CPP claims that he and his comrade Ka Sandra Reyes (Ka Kaye) were captured alive on December 24, 2021 during a firefight in Mabini Town, Davao de Oro ([CPP](#), January 13). The CPP accordingly accused the military of



deceptively setting the stage for a propaganda victory, while holding Ka Bok captive by distributing wanted posters and press releases saying they were in the process of hunting him down ([CPP](#), January 13). Then, on January 6, according to the CPP's version of events, the military launched their media blitz celebrating the great achievement of killing Ka Bok in a gun battle between the AFP and NPA the day before ([CPP](#), January 13). The CPP, however, alleges that the AFP tortured and then executed Ka Bok and blamed "the fascist murderer Rodrigo Duterte as the mastermind who gave the final order to execute Ka Bok while under custody" ([CPP](#), January 13).

The government and military paid little attention to these accusations and proceeded to impugn Ka Bok as a "terrorist" wanted on charges of arson, robbery with intimidation, rebellion, multiple murders, double frustrated murder, and more ([PTV News](#), January 8). As part of its narrative war, the Philippine government unveiled Joy "Ka Amihan" Saguino, an apparent former NPA cadre of Ka Bok. Saguino then denounced Ka Bok for "serving the violent Communist aspirations" and "for the terror and fear he strewed in every Filipino community" ([PNA](#), January 12).

The government alleges that authorities were tipped off by a "civilian informant" and the bounty of P5.6 million was divided up between this individual and others who provided information deemed relevant to the pursuit of Ka Bok in the past ([PTV News](#), January 8). It was later announced that Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte gave an additional P2 million reward that was split up and given to the informants. This was a gesture to incentivize others to come forward with relevant information on wanted Communists in the future ([PTV News](#), January 8).

### **Conclusion: Setbacks and Succession**

The Philippine Communist rebel movement cannot replace seasoned old guard

veterans on the level of Ka Bok and Ka Oris. However, the insurgency persists and those trained and inspired by these charismatic leaders will carry forward the lessons learned from them. The status and importance of these figures is evidenced by the Philippine government's dogged efforts to find and remove the core of long-serving "Red" veterans from the battlefield. Eliminating these individuals hurts Communist morale and provides major propaganda victories for the Philippine government and military.

With this said, there is a talent pool of experienced and competent fighters ready to assume leadership positions. The Philippine government believes that Ka Bok's role as top NPA leader in southern Mindanao will be taken over by 46-year-old Eric Jun Casilao, whose nom de guerre is "Ka Elian" or "Wally" ([Journal News Online](#), January 15). Despite being much younger than Ka Bok, Casilao has been involved in the Communist insurgent underground for 20 years and his wife May "Gab" Casilao is also in the movement. The Philippine government has put a large bounty on him and stated he is wanted for two counts of murder, kidnapping, and serious illegal detention ([Philippine News Agency](#), January 12).

Reiterating the importance of Casilao, the Philippine military named him among the ten "Most Wanted New People's Army rebels" on January 26 and predicted that the "NPA's Southern Mindanao Regional Committee will fall" once he is "neutralized," as he is the "group's secretary." The military assured the public that it was in "relentless" pursuit and was "monitoring Casilao" ([Twitter/@pnagovph](#), February 25).

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## **Allah Nazar: The Face of Baluch Separatist Militancy in Pakistan**

*Syed Fazl-e-Haider*

Allah Nazar is the leader of the Baluchistan Liberation Front (BLF), a banned militant group engaged in a war against Pakistan and seeking the independence of Baluchistan province. As a separatist Baluch leader, Allah Nazar's BLF has thus far carried out hundreds of terrorist attacks on Pakistan's armed forces and civilians. Nazar himself has become a new face of Baluch separatism, despite coming from a middle-class, as opposed to upper-class, family background.

Nazar was originally the founder of Baluch Student Organization Azad (BSO-Azad) ("Azad" means "free" in Urdu language), which has had great appeal among young Baluch's with separatist and militant tendencies ([Bolan Voice](#), February 24, 2013). His orientation toward youth recruitment since his time with BSO-Azad has meant he has long been popular among young Baluch's. Pakistan banned BSO-Azad in 2013 for its alleged involvement in terrorist activities ([DOPEL](#), April 2022).

The BLF has been strengthened by Nazar's ties to the disgruntled youth of Baluchistan, and indeed, the BLF still recruits its young, energetic, and daring members from BSO-AZAD.

### **Nazar's Early Life, Political Struggle, and Militancy**

Allah Nazar studied medicine and is a physician by profession. Born on October 2, 1968 in the Mashkay area of Baluchistan's Awaran district, he received his early education in that same district and completed his high school education in 1986. Nazar later relocated to Kech district in Baluchistan province and, in 1989, acquired his intermediate education from Atta Shad Degree College in Kech. After this, he moved to Quetta, the capital of

Baluchistan, where he attended Bolan Medical College in 1992. He became the winner of a gold medal in gynecology in 1999 while there ([The News](#), August 11, 2015; [People Pill](#), April 2022).

Nazar joined the BSO during his studies in Atta Shad Degree College in Kech in 1989. This was the beginning of his political career. In 2002, however, he gave up his political struggle as a Baluch nationalist and became a separatist by supporting armed struggle against the Pakistani state. He then formed his own militant group, BLF, and went underground in 2003. BLF first announced itself publicly in May 2004 when it claimed a terrorist attack that killed three Chinese engineers in the southern port city of Gwadar ([Dawn](#), May 5, 2004). In 2005, the country's intelligence agencies captured him in Karachi and for one year he was considered a missing person. In 2006, he was moved to a jail in Quetta, but was later released in 2008 by Pakistani authorities after he reached a deal with the military establishment and agreed to give up the path of violence and desist from terrorist activities against Pakistan ([Express Tribune](#), September 9, 2015). Nazar, however, violated the agreement and continued to orchestrate attacks on Pakistan's security forces. This forced him back underground after his release and he has since remained engaged in militant activities against Pakistan's security forces ([The News](#), August 11, 2015; [Express Tribune](#), September 9, 2015).

Although Nazar has not been captured since 2005, in October 2017, Pakistan's security forces detained four women and three children in Chaman on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border as they were travelling illegally into Pakistan from Afghanistan. The detainees included the wife and daughter of Nazar. A week later, the Baluchistan government set free the family members of Nazar because they were not involved in terrorist activities ([The News](#), November 4, 2017).

## **In Nazar's Own Words**

Nazar is neither a tribal chief nor the son of a Baluch tribal chief. Rather, his middle-class upbringing coincided with his challenging the prevailing tribal system in Baluchistan and his calling most of the Baluch tribal chiefs stooges of the Pakistani establishment. For example, he repeatedly stated, "the current tribal system is not the one our ancestors practiced." He strongly believed that tribalism and the tribal system was losing its influence across the province, which was beneficial because it was an obsolete and exploitative system that hindered Baluch progress ([The News](#), August 11, 2015).

In another interview, Nazar declared, "The Baluch movement is entirely a political struggle. Baluch militancy is also bound by the golden principles of politics. Our political ideals mean our political state; a democratic and prosperous Free Baluchistan." Further, he added that the "Baluch freedom movement is an indigenous movement from the very beginning. We rely on our own people who support us by all means; logistically as well as financially. We will keep continuing until victory. Although the international community has closed their eyes towards the Baluch, they are not fulfilling their international humanitarian obligations and are reluctant to move against Pakistan which has committed heinous crimes against humanity in Baluchistan."

He also stated, "there is more than one organization struggling for an independent Baluchistan, which has its own advantages and disadvantages. But all of us agree over one point, that is an independent Baluchistan. In this way we suffer more, but the brutality and tyranny of the occupier will compel us to unite and confront the enemy" ([Naked Punch](#), March 1, 2015).

## **Nazar's Attacks on Military and Civilian Targets**

Nazar's BLF has attacked both civilian and military targets in Baluchistan. He himself, for example, claimed several attacks on Pakistani security forces and carried out killings of non-Baluch Pakistani citizens along ethnic lines. Further, he was allegedly involved in targeted killings of dozens of journalists in Baluchistan ([Radio Free Europe](#), October 9, 2014).

In 2017, Nazar even threatened through a tweet from his now suspended personal account to kill school children. The tweet stated the "Pak[istan] army compels us to do the same in Lahore's schools So they may feel the pain of our kids. Don't scream then as you did in Peshawar" ([Security Analysis Blog](#), November 2, 2017). This indicated his threatening to repeat the attack in 2014 on the Army Public School in Peshawar city in which 132 school children were killed by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) ([Express Tribune](#), December 16, 2014). He even went so far as to announce that he will target Chinese interests in Baluchistan by declaring the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as the prime target of his militant group. BLF blames the Pakistani government for unfair exploitation of Baluchistan's natural resources and sees China as a partner in this exploitation. Hence, the group targets both Chinese nationals and Chinese projects in the province ([NDTV](#), February 3).

Most recently, on January 25-26, ten Pakistani soldiers were killed in a terrorist attack on a security forces checkpoint in Kech district of Baluchistan. The BLF claimed responsibility for the attack ([Dawn](#), January 27; [Gandhara](#), January 27). Responding to a question as to why his group attacks people from Punjab province on ethnic lines, Nazar stated he condemns attacks on civilians, but "one who supports the policies of the colonizer [the Pakistani state] and plays the role of fifth column,



the Baluch consider him as a collaborator. So the Baluch target the collaborators without any discrimination of ethnicity they belong to. No matter Baluch by race or a settler ([Naked Punch](#), March 1, 2015).” People from Punjab, which is the most populous province in Pakistan, tend to dominate the power corridors in Islamabad, including the military establishment, while Baluchistan is Pakistan’s largest province with respect to area, but is the least populous in the country. This has fed grievances against Islamabad and the Punjabi establishment for not providing sufficient funds to combat underdevelopment in Baluchistan province. Hence, Baluch-Punjab relations have been tense over distribution of federal resources, which is reflected in Nazar’s statements.

### **The Geopolitics of Nazar**

Nazar is believed to be using Iranian soil to orchestrate terrorist attacks inside Pakistan. His BLF is one component of Baluch Raaji Ajoji Sangar (BRAS), an umbrella group of Baluch insurgent groups. BRAS, which is based in Iran, has launched several attacks on Pakistani citizens. In 2019, it brutally killed 14 bus passengers along the border with Iran ([Arab News](#), June 5, 2020). Pakistani officials have, therefore, repeatedly called on Tehran to take action against BRAS militants ([Terrorism Monitor](#), March 25)

Pakistan also accuses its archrival India of fueling unrest in Baluchistan by funding the Baluch separatists, including Nazar’s BLF. Pakistani authorities claimed that the attack on Pearl Continental Hotel, a five-star hotel in Gwadar, on May 11, 2019 was masterminded by Nazar, with the alleged involvement of the Indian spy agency, Research Analysis Wing (RAW). The attack had allegedly been planned and financed by RAW, which remained in contact with the attacker using an Afghan phone number. As part of the plan, Nazar allegedly travelled to India on a fake Afghan passport under the cover name of Haji Nabi ([Dawn](#), November 15, 2020).

In an interview with an Indian media outlet in 2019, Nazar even expressed his grievances against Pakistan and asked the Indian government to extend help to Baluch separatist groups. He stated Pakistan has “no interest in the welfare of Baluchistan and the Baluch nation. They are only interested in our 750 miles long coast and minerals. So we Baluch have no way other than resistance, to divert the attention of the world towards oppressed Baluch. We appeal to the Indian government and PM Narendra Modi as the prime minister of the largest democracy of the world to support the Baluch movement morally, diplomatically and financially ([OPIndia](#), July 22, 2019).

### **Conclusion**

Pakistan's southwestern Baluchistan province, which borders Afghanistan and Iran, has been reeling under a Baluch separatist insurgency since 2004. It is evident from Nazar's profile that he abandoned the political struggle for the constitutional rights of Baluch people and adopted a path of militancy and has waged a war against the state of Pakistan. It was the frustration of many Baluch youth that pushed him and others into joining militant groups after Pakistan’s security forces killed veteran Baluch nationalist leader Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti in 2006 ([Dawn](#), August 27, 2006).

The 80-year old Bugti had served as chief minister and governor of Baluchistan province. Nazar has continued Bugti’s legacy, but what distinguishes Nazar from other Baluch separatist leaders is his middle class-background. This combined with his medical experience and appeal with the younger generations has only increased the influence of BLF.

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