



# MILITANT LEADERSHIP MONITOR

## Personalities Behind the Insurgency

p.1

Brief

*Jacob Zenn*

p.2

**Haris Farooqi:** Head of Islamic State in India Arrested in Assam

*Sanchita Bhattacharya*

p.4

**Horațiu Potra:** Romanian Mercenary in Africa Competes with Wagner Remnants

*Andrew McGregor*

p.7

**Abdul Hamid Khorasani:** The Opportunist of Panjshir Creates Headaches for Afghan Taliban

*Osama Ahmad*

## VOLUME XV, ISSUE 5 | May 2024

### **Higo al-Maghribi: ISGS Tongo Tongo Ambush Commander Confirmed Dead in Mali**

*Jacob Zenn*

#### **Executive Summary**

- Prominent Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS) commander Higo al-Maghribi was killed in Mali on May 29. He was primarily known for helping lead the Tongo Tongo ambush in 2017, the deadliest attack on U.S. forces in Africa since the 1993 "Battle of Mogadishu."
- Al-Maghribi was one of the most visible leaders of ISGS. With his death, only one of the three leaders of the Togo Togo attack remains at large, Ibrahim Ousmane.

On May 29, Higo al-Maghribi (alias Abu Huzeifa), the longtime face of Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS), was killed in Mali by the country's security forces. The

operation that killed al-Maghribi might have been conducted with the assistance of local Tuareg forces ([AP News](#), April 30). In terms of the deaths of top ISGS figures, this was one of the most important successes since the now-removed French forces eliminated Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi in 2021 ([Africa News](#), September 18, 2021).

While al-Sahrawi was the more prominent figure of the two, al-Maghribi was more frequently seen than nearly any other ISGS militant in the group's propaganda. Al-Maghribi maintained a distinct look. Wearing an unusually long and wide beard and sports goggles, and usually seen holding a captured rifle from U.S. special forces, al-Maghribi was an easily identifiable figure. The rifle and goggles were "trophies" from al-Maghribi's participation in the notorious ambush of U.S. special forces and a Malian unit on a joint patrol in Tongo Tongo, Niger. In the attack, ISGS killed four U.S. service members ([Jeune Afrique](#), November 2, 2017). ISGS's successful ambush led to the capture of both U.S. weapons and U.S. force's helmet cameras, which provided recordings that were used by ISGS in subsequent propaganda videos.

Al-Magribi participated in many more operations than just the Tongo Tongo ambush, however. This included the killings of rival JNIM fighters in August 2020. In one photograph released by ISGS, al-Magribi—as easily identified as ever—was seen beheading a JNIM fighter while ISGS fighters in motorcycles watched over him ([X/@calibreobscura](#), September 18, 2020).

Similarly, in late 2019 al-Magribi participated in the major ISGS attack on the Malian military base in Indelimane which killed more than 50 Malian soldiers ([Al Jazeera](#), December 3, 2019). Al-Magribi was seen in photos riding on a motorcycle, flanked by the IS flag on one side and another fighter on the other. More fighters preparing for the attack against Indelimane could be seen as well ([x/@menastream](#), November 19, 2019). This video was designed to display that al-Magribi was both a key operational and propaganda figure for ISGS.

The Tongo Tongo ambush was not ISGS's largest attack, though it appears to be the one al-Magribi was most proud of, and likely had the most international impact of any of his other activities. With the deaths of al-Sahrawi and al-Magribi, of the Tongo Tongo commanders, only Ibrahim Ousmane (alias Dandou Cheffou) remains at large. The United States has a \$5 million reward out for Ousmane, and given the chance, there is no question that Washington would push the Malian army and its auxiliaries to eliminate Ousmane ([U.S. Department of State](#), accessed June 2).

*Jacob Zenn is the Editor of Militant Leadership Monitor.*

## Haris Farooqi: Head of Islamic State in India Arrested in Assam

*Sanchita Bhattacharya*

### **Executive Summary**

- The Head of Islamic State (IS) in India Haris Farooqi was arrested on March 19 in Assam, India. Farooqi's capture cost IS one of its most capable organizers and recruiters in the region and could aid the government in identifying and eliminating the few remaining IS cells in India.
- Farooqi and an accomplice illegally entered India through the country's porous border with Bangladesh. This remains a longstanding problem, despite continued bilateral efforts between Delhi and Dhaka to halt the cross-border movement of militants and terrorists.

Haris Farooqi (alias Harish Ajmal Farukhi), the head of Islamic State (IS) in India, was arrested on March 19 by the Assam Police's Special Task Force (STF). He and his associate, Anurag Singh (*alias* Rehan), illegally entered India from Bangladesh ([The Hindu](#), March 21). They left from Kurigram in northwest Bangladesh to enter Assam State's Dhubri District in India ahead of the latter's 2024 general election ([Northeast News](#) [India] March 21; [Times of India](#), March 21). This represents the latest in a series of defeats for the increasingly degraded IS presence in the country ([Terrorism Monitor](#), [March 3, 2023](#), [March 1, 2024](#)). Farooqi has several National Investigation Agency (NIA; analogous to the FBI) cases pending against him, and is among the NIA's most-wanted militants due to his connection with

IS's node in Delhi ([NDTV](#), March 21; [India Blooms](#), December 27, 2023).

## Background

33-year-old Farooqi is legally a resident of the town of Chakrata in the northern Indian state of Uttarakhand. Farooqi is an educated man and has a degree in chemical engineering from Aligarh Muslim University (AMU). By profession, he is a teacher at Shaheen College in the Bidar District of the southern Indian state of Karnataka ([ThePrint](#), March 27, 2024). Farooqi's father also runs a traditional medicine dispensary in Dehradun, a town near his family home ([ETV Bharat](#), April 2).

Farooqi completed his engineering degree in the mid-2010s and was directly associated with his university's student union, where he met Singh. Farooqi's time coordinating and running the student association is believed to have sharpened the skills that he would later use to organize IS cells ([Hindustan Times](#), March 24). In addition to his organizational ability, Farooqi is also known as a charismatic recruiter ([The Hindu](#), March 21).

## Career

Farooqi has been active since the year 2019 and has set up IS cells in the Indian states of Goa, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Maharashtra, Delhi, and Karnataka ([The Economic Times](#) [India] March 21). A statement issued by the Indian police states that,

He is a highly indoctrinated and motivated leader/member of IS in India. He had furthered the cause of IS in India through conspiracies to carry out recruitment, terror funding, and terror acts at several places across India. Haris Farooqi is a master planner and executer for IS ([NDTV](#), March 21).

After quickly rising through the ranks of IS, Farooqi allegedly began arranging logistics for the group. He started with smaller cells

and then expanded. As a chemical engineer, Farooqi would be familiar with the various explosives and chemicals used in making bombs. He was allegedly involved in testing out at least one improvised explosive device (IED) ([Zee News](#), March 23).

## Arrest

Among his other activities, Farooqi was arrested for radicalizing Indian youths like Sunrag Singh. According to Indian Home Ministry officials, this was performed in part through the dissemination of IS propaganda through social media platforms ([The Economic Times](#) [India], March 21). Farooqi shared videos related to jihad, *hijrah* (migration) to Syria, and of IS supporters pledging *Bayat* (a sacred oath) to the IS caliph ([ThePrint](#), March 27). Indian police further claimed that Farooqi had identified targets for attacks across the country, including spots in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand ([New Indian Express](#), April 3; [ZeeNews](#), March 23).

## Conclusion

Although the security agencies in India are not making a show of having arrested the head of IS in India, Farooqi's capture could very well serve as a major breakthrough for investigators trying to hunt down any remaining active or sleeper IS cells in the country. Farooqi and his accomplice's exploitation of the porous India-Bangladesh border is indicative of a larger, longstanding issue. While bilateral efforts are ongoing between Delhi and Dhaka to halt the cross-border movement of militants and terrorists, Farooqi's infiltration of India demonstrates that there is still much work to be done.

*Dr. Sanchita Bhattacharya is a Research Fellow at the New Delhi-based Institute for Conflict Management. She works on terrorism and socio-political issues of Pakistan.*

## Horățiu Potra: Romanian Mercenary in Africa Competes with Wagner Remnants

Andrew McGregor

### **Executive Summary**

- Once thought a vestige of the past, Eastern European mercenaries have returned to Africa under the leadership of Romanian Horățiu Potra. Potra runs a private military company (PMC) composed of other Romanian former members of the French Foreign Legion.
- Both Potra and his company have been involved in a number of dubious activities in Africa over the past decades. Effectively competing with the Russian Africa Corps, which took over the Wagner Group's operations on the continent, Potra is presenting himself and his men as an alternative to Moscow's forces.
- Potra has recently entered Romanian politics on the side of a nationalist Eurosceptic party. Business competition aside, Potra has publically made pro-Russian statements, also denouncing Romania's military support for Ukraine.

*Congo Mercenary* was Major "Mad Mike" Hoare's account of his 1960s mercenary activities in the newly independent Republic of the Congo (today the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or DRC). His experience became the inspiration for movies like *Dark of the Sun* (1968) and *The Wild Geese* (1978) that forever linked White mercenaries and the

Congo in the popular imagination. This era appeared to come to a close, however, with the 1971 show-trial of German mercenary Rolf Steiner in Khartoum and the subsequent 1977 Organization of African Unity "Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa" in which mercenaries were outlawed in Africa as preservers of "colonial and racist domination" ([au.int](http://au.int), July 3, 1977).

Most of Hoare's "Five Commando" mercenary unit were acclimated South Africans or former residents of European colonies. When President Mobutu Sese Seko (1965–1997) reached for the aid of White mercenaries during the First Congo War (1996–1997) he discovered he could hire Eastern Europeans without colonial baggage (but often veterans of the vicious Balkan Wars) for less money than the usual West European or White African mercenaries.

Mobutu thus hired several hundred Eastern Europeans, mainly Bosnian Serbs, augmented by Croatians, Bosniaks, Ukrainians, and Russians. Unsurprisingly, most members of this so-called "White Legion" fell ill before making any useful contribution. [1] Unpaid and unsuccessful, the White Legion was sent home before the war was over. It was not, however, the end of Eastern European mercenaries in Africa, who have returned under the leadership of a Romanian ex-Legionnaire named Horățiu Potra.

### **Early Years**

Potra was born in 1970 in the Transylvanian town of Mediaș. He left school in 1992 to join the French Foreign Legion, completing his service in 1997. Potra was engaged in the late 1990s as a personal bodyguard to the Emir of Qatar, Hamid bin Khalifa al-Thani (1995–2013) ([Ziarero.antena3.ro](http://Ziarero.antena3.ro), July 15, 2009; [Observer](http://Observer) [Bucharest], February 9). The work involved international travel and offered Potra the opportunity to make high-level contacts in the security community.

## **In the Central African Republic: 2002–2003**

From 2002–2003, Potra, known at the time as “Lieutenant Henri,” was responsible for training the presidential guard of Ange-Félix Patassé in the Central African Republic (CAR). However, he fell out of favor after being suspected of collusion with rebel leaders like Mahamat Garfa and Mahamat Abbo Sileck (both members of the Tama ethnic group of north-eastern Chad) ([Great Lakes Eye](#) [Kigali], January 19, 2023).

Another Potra associate was the Chadian mercenary Abdoulaye Miskine (a.k.a. Martin Koumtamadji), a Hadjarai from the Guéra mountain range of south-central Chad who provided presidential security in the CAR. Miskine was arrested by Chadian authorities in 2019 and charged with insurrection, rape, murder, torture and kidnapping ([RFI](#), July 30, 2022). Never tried and excluded from a mass pardon in December 2023, “General” Miskine was last reported to be in ill health in Chad’s Klessoum Prison ([al-Wihda](#) [N’Djamena], February 20).

One of Potra’s more useful acquaintances from the CAR is Jean-Pierre Bemba, who was the Congolese defense minister from March 23, 2023 until June 12, 2024. Potra first came into contact with him when the Belgian-educated Bemba was invited to bring his Ugandan-backed Mouvement de Libération du Congo (MLC) rebel force to the CAR to protect President Ange-Félix Patassé from a coup attempt ([Great Lakes Eye](#) [Kigali], February 18).

Bemba’s MLC withdrew from the CAR in 2003 amid numerous allegations of rape, looting, and other disorder during their deployment ([The New Humanitarian](#), February 17, 2003). Arrested in Europe in 2008, Bemba returned to the Congo in 2018 after spending 10 years in detention in the Hague. He was eventually acquitted on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

When Patassé was overthrown by General François Bozizé in 2003, Potra was arrested by the rebels and sentenced to death before escaping. After being found by French troops he was evacuated to safety in Europe ([Ziarero.antena3.ro](#), July 15, 2009). [2]

## **Legionnaires to Mercenaries**

After his stint in the CAR, Potra became the director of the Romanian private military company (PMC) Asociatia RALF-ROLE (*Românii care au Activat în Legiunea Franceză-Roumanie Legion Etrangere*; Romanians Who Have Served in the French Legion–Romanian Foreign Legion), based in the Transylvanian city of Sibiu in Romania. Formed in 2007, RALF-ROLE describes itself on its website as “an association of former Romanian legionnaires who were active in the French Foreign Legion.” Using the ex-legionnaires’ experience “in security and investigation,” RALF-ROLE offers its services under the motto “Discretion, Safety, and Efficiency to serve and protect you and your business” ([Asociatia RALF](#), accessed May 29). Potra’s new group provided security for the diamond trade in Sierra Leone, including for African Minerals Limited, owned by Vasile Frank Timiș, a wealthy but controversial Romanian businessman ([Observer](#) [Bucharest], February 9).

## **Trouble at Home**

In Romania, Potra was investigated in 2010 on suspicion of drug trafficking and possession of weapons by the anti-organized crime prosecutor’s office, DIICOT ( *Direcția de Investigare a Infrațiunilor de Criminalitate Organizată și Terorism*, or Directorate for Investigating Organized Crime and Terrorism) ([Libertatea](#) [Bucharest], April 4, 2016). His arrest made headlines when DIICOT agents raided his home and found him sleeping with a loaded gun under his pillow ([Observer](#) [Bucharest], February 9). Potra ultimately received only a suspended sentence on a charge of keeping a firearm without a license ([Fanatik](#) [Bucharest],

April 14, 2023). There were also allegations he had threatened to kill Adrian Volintiru, the director of Romgaz, the state-owned natural gas company. The case was resolved when Volintiru withdrew the complaint ([Fanatik](#) [Bucharest], April 14, 2023).

### **In West Africa and the Sahel**

Potra later operated in Burkina Faso, where one of his men was abducted by Mokhtar Belmokhtar while guarding a manganese mine in 2015 ([Libertatea](#) [Bucharest]). Iulian Gherguț was not released until 2023, spending his eight years as a prisoner being shuttled back and forth between Mali and Burkina Faso ([Libertatia](#) [Bucharest], August 10, 2023). At the time, Potra's company was supplying security to mineral interests owned by Frank Timiș. Potra was also reported to have trained Chadian rebels ([Taz](#) [Berlin], January 9, 2023). By 2016, Potra was back in the CAR working as a bodyguard to President Faustin Touadéra ([Taz](#) [Berlin], January 9, 2023).

### **Deployment in Nord-Kivu**

Currently, Potras and his Romanians are engaged in active combat alongside the *Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo* (FARDC) and UN peacekeepers against the eastern Congo's M23 (Mouvement du 23 mars). M23 is a predominantly Congolese Tutsi anti-government militia operating in the province of Nord-Kivu with the support of Rwanda (see [Terrorism Monitor](#), July 26, 2012). Both the Nord-Kivu Tutsi and the Sud-Kivu Banyamulenge Tutsi suffer from ethnic discrimination and the threat of expulsion from the DRC due to widespread accusations of being "Rwandan foreigners" rather than natives of the Kivu region.

One Moldovan and two of Potra's Romanian mercenaries, Victor Railean and Vasile Badea, were killed in an M23 ambush in February ([DRC News](#), February 19). Four others were wounded when the Romanian unit remained under fire for ten hours while defending the city of Saké from an M23

offensive ([Libertatea](#) [Bucharest, February 9]).

Potra's fighters collaborate with Bulgarian PMC Agemira, led by French businessman Olivier Bazin (a.k.a. "Colonel Mario") ([Great Lakes Eye](#) [Kigali], January 19, 2023). Agemira maintains what is left of the DRC's aging, mostly Soviet-era air force ([Jeune Afrique](#), July 28, 2023). Georgian and Belarussian pilots are engaged to fly the DRC's helicopters and fighter jets ([Deutsche Welle](#), January 17, 2023; [Bellingcat](#), June 26, 2017). A Georgian helicopter pilot was captured by M23 in 2017. His fate remains unknown ([OC Media](#) [Tbilisi], May 26, 2017).

### **Conclusion**

Potra has recently taken an interest in Romanian politics. In February 2022, he became president of the Mediaș chapter of the *Alianței Pentru Patrie* (APP, Alliance for the Fatherland), a nationalist Eurosceptic party. Some days later, Potra issued a video addressed to the Romanian political class. Holding a machete, Potra declared: "You are all traitors to the country who serve foreign interests..." The mercenary chief also denounced Romania's military support for Ukraine: "What have the Russians done to us, how have they wronged us to be against them?" ([Fanatik](#) [Bucharest], April 14, 2023).

Nonetheless, Potra has tried to exploit the difference between Russian mercenaries with ties to the Kremlin and his own Romanians. According to Potra, Western governments "should be very happy that a European company is [in the DRC] that is not Wagner" ([Le Monde](#), March 20). The governments of the West have so far avoided displays of "happiness" over the deployment of Potra's Romanian soldiers of fortune in the long-suffering Congo. While Africa may have come to terms with the OAU's 1977 ban on the use of European mercenaries, their deployment is still seen by many Western nations as a contribution to insecurity rather than a desirable alternative to the Wagner Group or its

successor, the Russian Africa Corps (see [Militant Leadership Monitor](#), April 18).

*Andrew McGregor is Director of Aberfoyle International Security, a Toronto-based agency specializing in security issues related to the Islamic world.*

**Notes:**

[1] Jason K Stearns: *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: The Collapse of Congo and the Great War of Africa*. New York, 2011, p. 124.

[2] For more on European and African mercenaries in the CAR, see [AIS Special Report](#), February 5, 2022.

## **Abdul Hamid Khorasani: The Opportunist of Panjshir Creates Headaches for Afghan Taliban**

*Osama Ahmad*

### **Executive Summary**

- Abdul Hamid Khorasani is an opportunistic Taliban military commander from Afghanistan's Panjshir Province. An ethnic Tajik popular in his home province, Khorasani had previously voiced opposition to the Pashtu-dominated Taliban. Protected by his association with the Haqqani network, Khorasani has been able to criticize the Taliban's ethnic policies and threaten war with Iran and Pakistan, challenging Kabul's efforts to court Tehran and Islamabad.
- Known as one of the country's most wanted criminals under the U.S.-led regime, Khorasani appears to have been radicalized during a period spent in prison, after which he emerged as a pro-Taliban figure. He has held a number of different provincial roles under the current regime, the most recent of which he resigned out of protest in May.

Abdul Hamid Khorasani (alias Nasser Badri) is an ethnically Tajik Taliban military commander from Panjshir Province in Afghanistan. Khorasani is a commander in the Taliban's elite Badri 313 Battalion, which—much like himself—is closely associated with the Haqqani network ([Hasht e Subh Daily](#), April 22). Following the release of video clips by non-Pashtun Taliban fighters allied with Khorasani where

they decried their prejudicial treatment by the Taliban's leadership, Khorasani and his fellow fighters tendered their resignations ([X/@AfghanAnalyst2](#), May 12). This was considered a rebellion within the Taliban ranks, which could pit the Pashtun Taliban against the non-Pashtun Taliban ([Mashrig Vibe](#), May 11). However, during the border skirmishes between the Pakistani security forces and Taliban fighters in the days following Khorasani's resignation, Khorasani visited Dandpatan in Paktia Province to still show his support for the Taliban fighters ([X/AfghanAnalyst2](#), May 17).

Khorasani has raised objections with the Taliban's leaders over the matter on several occasions in the past. For instance, in 2023 he protested against the Taliban's mistreatment of himself and other non-Pashtun Taliban, claiming that "he has faced unprecedented humiliation and insult from the Taliban leadership" ([Afghanistan International](#), June 24, 2023). When his brother, Qari Abdul Moqim, was arrested by the Taliban in 2022, Khorasani stated that it occurred because of his Tajik ethnicity, rather than any sort of crime ([Aamaj News](#), November 19, 2022). Khorasani has a criminal past and has recently become the target of Pashtun Taliban criticism. Many in the Taliban's senior leadership distrust Khorasani due to his dubious personality, antics, and consistent claims of being a target of discrimination.

### **Criminal Past**

Khorasani was involved in crimes before he joined the Taliban in 2021, and was considered one of the former U.S.-backed Afghan government's most wanted criminals. Khorasani was notorious for his involvement in extortion, kidnappings, murders, and robberies. He also led a movement named Nahzat-e-Islami Muqawomat ([The Khama Press](#), June 25, 2019; [TOLO News](#), January 9, 2019). However, besides committing crimes, Khorasani was also involved in anti-Afghanistan activities in the past. On June 25, 2019, for example, Khorasani was

arrested for participating in a demonstration in Kabul, where he burned the flag of the Republic of Afghanistan. During the demonstration, Khorasani pointedly waved the green, white, and black flag of the Northern Alliance.

Khorasani's arrest at that time led to massive protests from people in Panjshir, demanding that President Ashraf Ghani release him ([iMedia](#), May 19). Khorasani's involvement in numerous demonstrations and protests orchestrated by politicians appears to have been driven by financial incentives. For instance, the former Vice President Ahmad Zia Massoud and the former Governor of Balkh Province Atta Mohammad Noor would pay Khorasani to work for them and feature their pictures on his banners. Every year, on the anniversary of Ahmad Shah Massoud's death, Khorasani would also organize an armed rally in the streets of Kabul ([Hasht e Subah Daily](#), May 15). Due to such activities, he was despised by loyalists of the former Afghan government.

### **Joining the Taliban**

Although he was initially opposed to the Taliban, Khorasani eventually became inclined toward religious extremism. This occurred during his imprisonment under the former Afghan government and seems to have been solidified after he met with Salafi cleric Zaher Daei. Following his joining the Taliban, the organization appointed Khorasani as the security chief of Panjshir ([TOLO News](#), March 20, 2022). He then pursued the anti-Taliban elements in Panjshir, arresting hundreds of them. Khorasani became one of the prime suspects in the killing of Akmal Amir, a well-known anti-Taliban commander.

Moreover, Khorasani developed strong ties with the Haqqani network and was supported by its leader and the current Afghan Interior Minister, Sirajuddin Haqqani. However, Khorasani's relations with the Pashtun-centric Kandahari Taliban have remained poor. Khorasani is also alleged to have private prisons where he



detains and interrogates dissident Afghans before handing them over to Taliban intelligence. Ever a financial opportunist, accruing financial benefits appears to have been another key aspect of Khorasani joining the Taliban. Where once he criticized the Taliban during the previous Afghan government, Khorasani would later serve the Taliban, rendering his services for a fee ([Hasht e Subah Daily](#), May 15).

However, Khorasani was later dismissed as the Taliban's security chief for Panjshir after locals accused him of abusing his authority. Following his dismissal, Khorasani alleged that he was not dismissed by the Taliban's central leadership but by the governor of Panjshir, Malawavi Qudratullah. He had turned against the provincial governor and accused him of mistreating the residents of Panjshir, urging the Taliban leadership to dismiss Qudratullah ([TOLO News](#), March 20, 2022). Khorasani also survived an assassination attempt by the anti-Taliban National Resistance Front (NRF) on January 29, 2022 ([Pajhwok Afghan News](#), January 29, 2022). The NRF is led by Ahmad Massoud—the son of Ahmad Shah Massoud, the man Khorasani organized rallies in Kabul just years earlier (see [Militant Leadership Monitor](#), December 5, 2022).

### **Controversial Figure**

Since joining the Taliban, Khorasani has been involved in a number of controversies. This year, for example, he married for the fourth time in an ostentatious ceremony, which included an escort composed of a convoy of military vehicles ([X/AfghanAnalyst](#), May 2, 2024). This extravagance drew criticism from the Taliban.

In March, when the Pakistani forces clashed with the Taliban at the Durand Line (the officially recognized border between Afghanistan and Pakistan), Khorasani also attacked the Pakistani army chief, General Asim Munir. Khorasani stated, "The holy warriors of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan

(TTP) shall soon overthrow your infidel and oppressive government. Pakistan shall be eradicated from the face of the planet upon the orders of [Afghan Taliban Supreme Leader] Mullah Hibatullah." In another video, Khorasani responded to the former interim information minister of Balochistan, Jan Achakzai, by stating, "My message to Jan Achakzai, Asim Munir, Asif Zardari is that Afghans defeated the British, Russia, and USA. Pakistan is insignificant for us. Taliban fighters and TTP together will fight Pakistan's apostate army." Previously, Achakzai had posted on his X account that, "If another terrorist attack takes place in Pakistan, the Taliban have already been warned. There will be no other option. Pakistan will quickly enter Afghanistan and directly connect to Central Asia by capturing the Wakhan Corridor" ([News Intervention](#), March 22).

Khorasani has also seized vehicles and properties of individuals who have fled Afghanistan. He currently resides in the house of Haji Homayoun, the former owner of Khurshid Television. He has also confiscated Land Cruisers belonging to the officials of the former Afghan government and now uses them as his own vehicles. Khorasani has repeatedly freed Panjshiri youths after arresting and torturing them in exchange for money ([Hasht e Subah Daily](#), May 15).

### **Saber-Rattling Against the Neighbors**

In January, in a live discussion with Afghanistan International TV about General Asim Munir's remarks, Khorasani asserted that the Taliban are impatiently awaiting the start of *Ghazwa-e-Hind*, an Islamist prophecy that speaks of Islamic armies taking India as part of the end of times, to conquer Pakistan. In the same discussion, he explained why the Taliban leadership did not respond to General Asim Munir's comments. Khorasani suggested that the Taliban do not consider Pakistan as their counterpart, but rather consider it a puppet whose counterparts are countries like the United States and United Kingdom ([X/AfghanAnalyst2](#), January 27).

Previously, in a session with students from public and private sector universities in Pakistan, General Asim Munir commented that "When it comes to the safety and security of every single Pakistani, the whole of Afghanistan can be damned" ([The Express Tribune](#), January 25).

In November 2023, Khorasani met the TTP chief, Noor Wali Mehsud, to discuss the TTP's operations in Pakistan as well as the destruction of Pakistan's secular system and its eventual replacement with an Islamic one. Khorasani also held a prayer session with the TTP fighters in the presence of some Afghan Taliban members, calling for the TTP's victory in Pakistan. Notably, this included mention of Afghan Taliban assistance, with an eventual raising of the Afghan Emirate's flag over Islamabad ([X/Natsecjeff](#), November 4, 2023).

During the Iran–Afghanistan border clashes over a water dispute in May 2023, Khorasani also exclaimed that Afghanistan "[w]ill conquer Iran soon if the Taliban leader gives the green light" ([Middle East Monitor](#), May 30, 2023; see [Terrorism Monitor](#), August 8, 2023). Previously, Khorasani published a video clip in which he warned Iran that, "It owes gratitude to the patience of the Taliban leadership; otherwise, the Taliban forces will fight Iran more enthusiastically than they did in the jihad against the United States." At around the same time, Khorasani resigned from the position of governor of Ahmad Aba District in Paktia Province, citing differences with the Taliban leadership ([X/AfghanAnalyst2](#), May 21, 2023). He had held this position for only two months. Adding to the mixed signals, Khorasani had once announced that he would quit the Taliban and live a civilian life. Though evidently not followed through on, Khorasani's statement came from late 2022, after his cousin had been killed by the Taliban while fighting for the NRF ([X/Natsecjeff](#), August 28, 2022).

## Conclusion

The Taliban leadership fears that Khorasani poses a threat to their regime, suspecting that he is exploiting ethnic divisions within their ranks for his own advantage. Khorasani is an opportunist who previously benefitted from bullying the former Republic and is now taking advantage of the ethnic tensions in the Taliban regime. Khorasani's unrestrained statements are actively harming the Taliban's relationship with its neighbors, something Kabul can ill afford. At the same time, the Taliban cannot risk expelling Khorasani from their organization over fears that he might subsequently align with either Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) or the anti-Taliban resistance forces (like the NRF).

*Osama Ahmad is an Islamabad-based freelance journalist. He writes about militancy, geopolitics, cybercrime, terrorism, organized crime, technology, human rights, gender disparities, climate change, political violence, ethnic nationalism, and CVE related issues.*