



# Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

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## Nigeria and the Threat of al-Qaeda Terrorism

By Bestman Wellington

Not long ago, Mike Mbama Okiro, Nigeria’s inspector general of police, raised an alarm over threats by al-Qaeda to launch an attack using time-bombs on Nigerian soil. Okiro’s warning generated much attention in local and international media. Islamic groups in Nigeria, including the Supreme Council for Sharia in Nigeria (SCSN), held several press conferences debunking such claims, and labeled Okiro a “liar.” The police chief did not give more details about his allegation, but said his warning was based on intelligence reports. An SCSN spokesman said: “The police know where the terrorists are and Muslims should not be referred to as terrorists. The militants are terrorists for kidnapping and killing people and the police should go there and stop tagging Muslims as terrorists” (*Nigerian Tribune*, May 21).

Later a Nigerian newspaper quoted a police high command statement asking Nigerians to disregard recent media reports on the purported threats from al-Qaeda: “For the avoidance of doubt, the Inspector General of Police’s only public pronouncement on terrorism was on 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2008 during the inauguration of the anti-terrorism squad when he said, ‘The creation of the new outfit is borne out of our mission to safeguard our environment against terrorism, even though the nation has not experienced terrorist attack; we don’t have to wait until it happens before we start to prepare.’ ” (*This Day* [Lagos], May 20). Despite the apparent reversal on the threat assessment, special Nigerian anti-terrorist squads were deployed to Lagos, Abuja and Port Harcourt (Panapress, May 14).

Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation with over 140 million people, roughly split equally between Christians and Muslims. The two groups usually live side by side peacefully, but there are occasional outbreaks of sectarian conflict. Tension heightened in 2000 after 12 mainly Islamic northern states began a stricter enforcement of Shari'a (Islamic law), alienating sizeable Christian minorities. Thousands were killed in sporadic riots across the country. Last September the U.S. embassy in Nigeria said the country was at risk of "terrorist attack," and in 2003 Osama bin Laden named the world's eighth biggest oil exporter as ripe for jihad or Islamic holy war (Reuters, May 10).

A number of suspected jihadis have been arrested by police and the Nigerian State Security Service (SSS) in recent years, but the cases have dragged on in the courts and there have been no convictions. No conclusive evidence of al-Qaeda's presence in Nigeria has been made public. Five Islamist militants with suspected links to al-Qaeda are on trial in the capital, Abuja, for plotting attacks on the government (VOA, December 9, 2007). The men were arrested in November 2007 by the SSS in the mainly Muslim north of Nigeria. Three of them have also been charged with training in Algeria with the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) between 2005 and August 2007. The GSPC renamed itself al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in January 2007.

The northern part of Nigeria has witnessed some Islamist violence in the past. There are several armed Islamist groups throughout the northern region, but whether they are linked to bin Laden's al-Qaeda is not clear. These groups include the Hisbah, the Zamfara State Vigilante Service (ZSVS), Al-Sunna Wal Jamma ("Followers of the Prophet," also known as "the Nigerian Taliban") and others. To understand Nigeria's militant Islamist movement it is necessary to briefly look at the origins of some of the groups, their composition, leadership, areas of operation and sources of financing/support:

- The Hisbah are an Islamic vigilante group that support adherence to Shari'a, which several states in northern Nigeria have adopted in recent years (the civil code, covering wills, marriage, and so forth, has been in force across the Nigerian federation since 1979). These groups do not usually carry firearms, but are more likely to carry sticks and whips as well as

knives and curved weapons with a blade known as a "barandami."<sup>1</sup>

The Hisbah groups are sponsored by state governments in the north that practice Shari'a, and draw their membership from the army of unemployed in those states. They were considered instrumental in influencing the outcome of the 2003 elections

- Another Islamist group which operates in the northern part of Nigeria is the Zamfara State Vigilante Service (ZSVS). The ZSVS wear red uniforms and have been described as a "ragtag volunteer army" that patrols Zamfara state arresting anyone suspected of violating Islamic law. The group reportedly carries pistols along with homemade machetes and whips. The governor of Zamfara state has been the driving force directing the ZSVS and organizing its funding.<sup>2</sup>

- Al-Sunna Wal Jamma was formed sometime around 2002. Its objective is the establishment of Nigeria as an Islamic state; its adherents are predominantly Maiduguri university students from the northeastern part of Nigeria. Some 200 members apparently took up arms for the first time in December 2003, possibly in response to the attempt by the governor of Yobe to disband the group.

So fervent is its adherence to a fundamentalist notion of Islam that locals have dubbed it "the Taliban" in recognition of the group's admiration for the former Afghanistan government, toppled by Coalition forces in 2001. Indeed, Al-Sunna Wal Jamma once replaced the Nigerian flag with the Afghan flag on a state building briefly occupied during an altercation with police.

The porosity of the Nigerian border, economic hardship and religious tensions combine to make these Islamic groups vulnerable to recruitment into dangerous terrorist networks, threatening the security of the country. The alarm raised by Police Chief Mike Okiro regarding threats to the Nigerian nation by al-Qaeda extremists might not be backed by intelligence reports,

<sup>1</sup> See Nicolas Florquin and Eric G. Berman (ed.s), *Armed and Aimless; Armed Groups, Guns, and Human Security in the ECOWAS region*, Geneva, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

but in Nigeria, particularly in the Muslim north, there are various armed Islamist formations with agendas similar to that of Osama bin Laden.

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## Military Operations in FATA: Eliminating Terrorism or Preventing the Balkanization of Pakistan?

By Tariq Mahmud Ashraf

Ever since the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and the radical turnaround in Pakistan's policy toward the Taliban, there has been an ongoing debate in Pakistan over whether President Pervez Musharraf has gone too far in supporting the U.S.-sponsored War on Terrorism. The popular sentiment against Musharraf has been unequivocally demonstrated by the result of the February 18 general elections where his political supporters suffered an abject defeat. While there is enough evidence to substantiate Musharraf's compulsion in supporting the United States, it is equally important not to lose sight of the importance the War on Terrorism has for Pakistan's national interests.

The recent events in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) indicate the imperative for Pakistan to quell the resurgence of militant extremist elements. An objective view of the current situation in FATA reveals several similarities between the situation there and that which prevailed in erstwhile East Pakistan in 1971. It has been over three and a half decades since Lt. Gen. Amir Abdullah Khan Niazi of the Pakistan Army, along with 93,000 servicemen, surrendered to Lt. Gen. Jagjit Singh Aurora, the commander of the Indian and Bangladeshi Forces, marking the fall of East Pakistan's provincial capital city of Dhaka and the creation of the independent country of Bangladesh out of the former eastern wing of Pakistan. A comparison of the situation that existed in East Pakistan prior to that fateful day in December 1971 with what is happening today in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) exposes several worrying similarities between the two.<sup>1</sup>

1 Apart from the author's personal knowledge and experience of having lived and gained early education in East Pakistan prior to the 1971 creation of Bangladesh, the author's late father and

Ever since the Pakistan Army ventured into FATA in its quest to uproot the alleged al-Qaeda elements operating there, there have been numerous incidents of civilian casualties. Some of these have come as a result of the army's operations while others have been the result of increased attacks by missile-equipped Predator unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) operated by the CIA and the U.S. military. The situation in FATA is now growing alarmingly similar to that which prevailed in erstwhile East Pakistan after the March 1971 crackdown by the Pakistan Army. The latest in the spate of such incidents has been the virtual destruction of the town of Spinkai in South Waziristan by the Pakistan Army's 14<sup>th</sup> Division, resulting in a large number of casualties and the displacement of over 200,000 people (*Dawn* [Karachi], May 10).

The unique geographic disposition of the two wings of Pakistan when the country came into being in 1947 saw the two segregated parts growing further apart with the passage of time. Notwithstanding the fact that they outnumbered the West Pakistanis, the inhabitants of East Pakistan were justifiably aggrieved at being treated like second class citizens in a country that they had equally struggled for. Nowhere was this unjust treatment more obvious than in the government services, especially the military. Until as late as 1965, the Pakistan Army had only one battalion from East Pakistan, the East Bengal Regiment (EBR), and even this unit was commanded by a mix of officers from the Eastern and the Western wings of Pakistan.<sup>2</sup>

A similar scheme was implemented for the paramilitary forces. Just like the Pakistan Rangers and the Frontier Corps in West Pakistan, the East Pakistan Rifles (EPR) was established in East Pakistan. Once again, while the soldiers and other ranks were from East Pakistan, a sizeable number of the regular army officers assigned to the EPR formations came from West Pakistan. The realization that the East Pakistanis were poorly and inadequately represented in the country's army led to four additional battalions of the East Bengal Regiment being raised immediately after the 1965 war, but this gesture was "too little and too late."<sup>3</sup>

his father-in-law were both officers in the Pakistan Army and served in various capacities in the EBR and the EPR for over two decades each. As such, this article relies largely on the personal knowledge of the author and his family members.

2 The author's late father was one of the Company Commanders in No. 1 EBR which served on the Bedian front near Lahore during the 1965 war. Manned entirely by Bengali soldiers, NCOs and JCOs, the unit at that time had a mix of officers from East and West Pakistan.

3 In his last assignment in East Pakistan, the author's late



This lack of integration within the military between the personnel from the two wings of the country and the gross disparity in numbers in favor of personnel hailing from West Pakistan were factors that would play a crucial role during the 1971 war. When hostilities broke out, the first action of the Bengali soldiers in the EBR and EPR units was to exterminate their West Pakistani officers and assume control of the weapons and equipment available in their units. From here on, neutralizing other pro-West Pakistan entities and joining hands with the invading Indian Army and the local militants from the Mukti Bahini (the Bengali “Liberation Army”) was basically just a logical progression of events. The specter of the native-dominated Frontier Corps undertaking similar action in FATA is a frightening possibility.

In comparing the situation and the military strategy employed by the Pakistan Army in East Pakistan and that now being employed in FATA, one must not lose sight of the cultural and societal differences between the East Bengali Muslims and the tribal Pashtuns. While the former are a normally docile, hard-working and peace-loving group who seldom resort to militancy and the use of weapons, the latter open their eyes every day in a world that revolves around weapons and militancy. From this perspective, the manner in which the situation was handled in East Pakistan and the way that it is being handled in FATA have to be different in order to be effective. Whereas in East Pakistan, the Pakistani military had trained only a limited number of local inhabitants in the use of weapons and the art of warfare, the adversary in FATA is already well versed in these areas and has experience combat fighting against the Russians during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. As such, the adversary that the Pakistan Army confronts in FATA is a trained and seasoned combatant who also has the significant advantage of belonging to the region and being totally familiar with its topography and terrain. The suspected presence of seasoned foreign militants in this region further compounds the issue.

Traditionally, the role of maintaining security in FATA has been assigned to the Frontier Corps, a paramilitary outfit very similar in composition to the EPR. Like the EPR formations, the entire junior manpower of the Frontier Corps is recruited from local tribesmen with the entire officer cadre coming from the regular Pakistan Army. Since the Pakistan Army’s officer cadre is fairly well integrated at the national level, a sizeable number of these officers hail from provinces other than

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father served as the Second-in-Command of No. 5 Battalion of the EBR, then stationed in the northern city of Rangpur.

the NWFP—most notably from the Punjab.

The Frontier Corps is a legacy of British rule. In order to maintain a semblance of control over the hostile and militant natives of this region, the British opted to employ the locals as soldiers and placed British officers in command of these formations. Rather than being an externally focused outfit responding to aggression from across the border, the Frontier Corps was designed more as an internal security force with the prime objective of maintaining law and order in the volatile tribal belt and ensuring the safety of all strategic communication routes (see *Terrorism Monitor*, March 29, 2007). The deployment and disposition of the Frontier Corps has changed only slightly since the British era. Most of the outposts and garrisons of the Frontier Corps are located in areas through which strategic communication routes pass or in areas where tribesmen could be expected to become unruly and need to be controlled by force.

Ever since Pakistan achieved independence in 1947, successive governments in Islamabad have tended to leave FATA alone, with no concerted efforts being made to integrate this area into Pakistan. This is borne out by the fact that the tribal areas did not have adult franchise until 1996, nor do the Pakistan Police have any authority to enter and operate inside FATA. As was the case during British colonial rule, law and order in the tribal areas continues to be governed by the decades-old Frontier Crimes Regulations, which have yet to be replaced by the Pakistan Penal Code that applies elsewhere throughout the country.

Due to its proximity to Afghanistan and the porous and indefensible nature of the terrain, Pakistan’s tribal belt became the hub of training for the Afghan mujahideen during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Apart from leading to the influx of enormous amounts of military hardware and weaponry into the region, this period also led to the arrival of numerous Islamic militants from other parts of the world. Many of these foreigners stayed behind after the Soviet retreat from Afghanistan and assimilated into the local tribes by marrying local women and settling down.

An analysis of the current situation in FATA reveals several stark similarities between what is happening in FATA today and what happened in East Pakistan during the period leading to the creation of Bangladesh:

- Just as East Pakistan had the EPR and the EBR formations manned entirely by locals but

commanded by outsiders, the Frontier Corps, which is the main security organ in FATA, is also manned entirely by local manpower at the junior levels but has officers from the Pakistan Army who do not necessarily belong to the same province.

- Similar to the lack of integration among military personnel belonging to East and West Pakistan that was evident in 1971, there have been no efforts to integrate the almost 80,000 local tribesmen who have joined the ranks of the Frontier Corps with the regular Pakistan Army.
- While the Bengali militants found willing supporters across the border in India, the tribesmen of FATA have a strong affinity and cultural, ethnic, social, religious and linguistic ties with the natives inhabiting Afghanistan's border regions with Pakistan. Though it is understandable that no significant military support might be forthcoming from this quarter as long as U.S. and NATO forces are waging the war against the Taliban inside Afghanistan, logistical support and safe havens / refuge would definitely be available for Pakistani tribesmen fleeing across the border into Afghanistan.
- With the entire Frontier Corps of almost 80,000 local natives commanded by a handful of officers who happen to be outsiders, a recurrence of native troops turning against their officers (as in East Pakistan) is a possibility in FATA.
- Just as the EPR and EBR had their sympathies with the local inhabitants of East Pakistan, the personnel of the Frontier Corps have very strong societal and familial links with the tribesmen of FATA since these personnel belong to the same tribes. This is probably the main reason why so many of these soldiers have opted to surrender to the militants rather than fight against them during the past few months.
- Similar to East Pakistan, where a sizeable number of Hindus with obvious sympathy for neighboring India lived within its territory, the tribal belt has a significant number of foreign Islamic extremist elements who cannot ever contemplate returning to homelands where they have been declared offenders to public order. Having assimilated themselves into the local

tribal system of life, these individuals are bound to resist any efforts by Pakistan's military to actively disrupt the freedom of action that they have become accustomed to.

- Like the situation that prevailed in East Pakistan where the neighboring Indians had never truly reconciled themselves to the creation of Pakistan, the Afghans have also never really accepted the legality of the Durand Line—an arbitrary frontier delineated by the British more than a century ago.<sup>4</sup>

### Conclusion

It appears that the Pakistan Army has neither learned nor assimilated the lessons of 1971 since it appears to be bent upon repeating the same mistakes. In order to prevent any further break-up of Pakistan it is imperative that these issues be addressed immediately.

The Pakistani government and its military are faced with a difficult scenario in the country's northwestern regions that border Afghanistan. The geography of this region, its peculiar socio-cultural ethos and the historical traditions of its inhabitants require that the emerging situation in these areas be handled differently. In this context, it would be prudent for the military in Pakistan to review the lessons it learned during the 1971 East Pakistan crisis so as to not repeat the mistakes that led to the defeat of 1971. Whereas FATA's geographic contiguity with the rest of Pakistan presents an entirely different scenario from what the country was faced with the geographically distinct East Pakistan, it must be considered whether the situation in FATA needs to be handled through the employment of military force or whether other options are available.

Considering that a substantial number of U.S. and NATO troops are likely to remain engaged against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan for at least the foreseeable future, an early return of peace and stability to Pakistan's tribal areas would have a significant positive impact on anti-Taliban operations in Afghanistan. As such, the achievement of stability in the northwestern territories of Pakistan should be a joint priority for the Pakistani military as well as for the foreign forces engaged in Operation Enduring Freedom inside Afghanistan.

<sup>4</sup> See Tariq Mahmud Ashraf, "The Durand Line: Pakistan's Next Trouble Spot," *Asian Affairs*, January 2004.

It must also be kept in mind that if Pakistan plans to exploit its access to the warm waters of the Arabian Sea by acting as a gateway for the trade of the resource-rich Central Asian states, it is vital that Afghanistan and Pakistan's tribal areas be stabilized as early as possible. Since the opening up of these strategic land trade routes would be beneficial for all the stake holders, it is in everyone's interest to work toward the goal of a stable and peaceful Afghanistan and Pakistan.

While there is no doubt that fighting the extremist militant elements in FATA is important, as is supporting the global War on Terrorism, Pakistan's military must contemplate whether these efforts are more important than the very existence of Pakistan as a viable nation-state. Pakistan must, therefore, consider the war against the militant extremists operating from inside FATA as a war for its own existence and stability rather than an operation being undertaken at the behest of the United States and the West. If this conviction is spread within the disillusioned elements of Pakistan's population, the government might possibly continue the ongoing War against Terrorism in a more efficient, forceful and effective manner.

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## Turkey's Multifaceted Anti-PKK Strategy Continues to Unfold

By Frank Hyland

Signs continue to emerge that Turkey has adopted a multifaceted strategy to combat the insurgency of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Following a series of military operations and economic reforms in Turkey's largely Kurdish southeast region, it appears Turkey is now addressing PKK financing achieved through its role in the Eurasian narcotics trade.

This latest phase in Turkey's strategy is being undertaken in cooperation with Washington, as seen in the May 30 announcement by the United States that officially imposed sanctions on the PKK under the U.S. Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act of 1999. The designation prohibits U.S. firms and individuals from

engaging in transactions with the group. A U.S. national security spokesman stated: "Now that the PKK has been designated under the kingpin act, the penalties for doing business with them are much higher... We also now have the authority to target and designate other PKK entities and associates for narcotics activity. Before, we were limited to this group's terror activities" (*Hurriyet*, June 2; *Today's Zaman*, June 2).

Following a series of visits to the United States by senior Turkish civilian and military officials, culminating in a meeting with Prime Minister Erdogan last November, the governments of Turkey and the United States declared that the United States would provide assistance to Turkey in its efforts to detect and counter the PKK in the field through the provision of real-time, actionable intelligence on PKK facilities and guerrilla movements (see *Terrorism Focus*, November 6, 2007; *Turkishpress.com*, October 23, 2007). This was followed in December by the Turkish military campaign that continues to the present. The campaign began with air operations (al-Jazeera, December 16, 2007), leading to a major incursion by ground forces in midwinter—named Operation Gunes—that neutralized hundreds of PKK guerrillas, according to Turkish military sources (see *Terrorism Focus*, April 9; *Hurriyet*, March 13). The military strategy proved highly effective, especially compared to the results in recent years when the PKK followed Turkish operations by increasing its use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) against Turkish troops with devastating effect.

With respect to the PKK's involvement in organized crime, the May 30 U.S. designation of the PKK as a drug-trafficking organization is analogous to the November 2007 start of the improved Turkish military campaign in the sense that it signals the onset of a better coordinated campaign, the success of which is highly likely if sufficient follow-through occurs (*Today's Zaman*, June 2). It is safe to say that the PKK can count on a campaign against its criminal activities that will be the equivalent of Turkey's military campaign. It will take a bit longer, especially to fully implement it, but Turkey's success thus far in its military campaign virtually guarantees that the anti-drug effort will happen and that it will be effective. The situation requires a concerted multi-front effort because terrorist groups such as the PKK long ago recognized the value of moving and selling drugs, trafficking in human beings and moving the resulting revenues to their coffers to acquire weapons.

The U.S. designation of the PKK is merely the latest, most-visible sign of the growing realization of the interconnectedness of terrorism and organized criminal activity, especially the degree of interaction between terrorist groups and organized crime organizations. What the PKK and other groups engaged in criminal activities such as drug trafficking may not yet realize—but will certainly realize in the coming years—is that the effort against criminal activity and illicit finance has matured greatly since the early-to-mid-1990s. A true cooperating international network with a finer and finer mesh to its net has emerged as more and more nations have had it demonstrated to them that criminal activity is fully capable of competing with national governments and, in a number of instances—Mexico, Colombia and Afghanistan, to name just a few—capable of rivaling the central government in political power and influence. The continuing development of multinational organizations such as Interpol and Europol and advancements in communications technology now permit investigatory efforts to proceed with much greater speed than in the past.

While it may require patience, cracking down on the PKK's criminal activities, including drug trafficking, will ultimately be successful. The Turkish strategy is aimed at a significant vulnerability that, until now, has been under-exploited. As is the case with any other enterprise, the PKK must have funds to carry out its activities, whether they be propaganda, arms acquisitions, or simply feeding its personnel on a daily basis. Drying up the group's source of revenues, even partially, will place considerable restraints on its ability to continue to mount attacks given the lack of alternative sources of income for the PKK and its isolated location in the mountains of northern Iraq.

Reports of PKK involvement in drug trafficking are not new, of course, and certainly are not unknown to the Turkish government. It is the government's coordinated approach that is the innovation which will pay dividends. All estimates of criminal activity are difficult at best; the consensus, however, is that the PKK—sitting astride the crossroads—controls in one way or another the great majority of drug trafficking between Central Asia and the lucrative markets in Western Europe and beyond. In the year 2007 alone, Turkish officials reported seizing 31 tons of opium and 13 tons of heroin (*Today's Zaman*, May 27). One recent estimate by Lieutenant General Ergin Saygun, deputy chief of the Turkish General Staff, judged the PKK's annual revenues at €400 to €500 million—roughly \$640 to \$800 million if true. Of those

amounts, according to General Saygun, it is believed that 50 to 60 percent is derived from drug trafficking (*Turkish Daily News*, March 13).

As has been the case with Colombia's Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) and Peru's Sendero Luminoso, the PKK began its involvement in drug trafficking in the 1980s by extorting money from other traffickers and then shifting more and more directly into moving the drugs themselves. Interpol, for example, has claimed that the PKK, in one way or another, was behind fully 80 percent of the European illicit drug market in 1992 (*Today's Zaman*, June 2). More importantly, and from the perspective of the PKK itself, Dr. Sedat Laciner, writing in the *Journal of the Turkish Weekly*, has stated that drug trafficking is the "main" source of the PKK's funds and that "Turkey has become one of the crucial narcotics centers of the world," warning that illicit drugs transiting Istanbul and other Turkish cities to Western Europe are transformed into not only terrorist violence but also a corresponding loss of power and authority on the part of Ankara. This, of course, makes the full implementation of the Turkish strategy even more urgent (*Journal of the Turkish Weekly*, June 1).

Notwithstanding the enhanced cooperative effort against drug trafficking, cooperation from some of Turkey's allies has been uneven. While singling out and praising Germany for its efforts, Turkey has been quoted as mentioning specifically what it considers to be deficiencies in anti-narcotics activities on the part of a number of Western European nations—Austria, Italy, Belgium and Denmark among them. The continued presence of ROJ-TV, the PKK television outlet in Denmark, has come in for special emphasis in Turkish pronouncements. The Netherlands and Belgium, self-professed partners in the war on drugs, are reported to be home to producers of a good portion of the synthetic drugs in Western Europe, including the infamous "Ecstasy" (*Today's Zaman*, May 27).

Two other legs in Turkey's strategy also are unfolding concurrently. First, Ankara has already announced steps to deal with the weak economy of its southeastern region and the long-suffering Kurds there, many of whom become prime candidates for PKK recruitment activities. Showing the importance that the region has to Turkey, Prime Minister Erdogan announced on May 27 an allocation of an additional \$15.5 billion in funding to complete the Southeast Anatolian Project—underway since the early 1980s—with an estimate that the program



would create four million new jobs in the impoverished southeast (*Milliyet*, May 28).

Secondly, Turkey's relations with Kurdish authorities in northern Iraq are already much closer than would have seemed possible only a year ago. The Iraqi Kurdish administration has announced additional steps to counter the PKK that include establishing additional checkpoints, closer screening at airports for PKK members, and directing the closure of a number of PKK and PKK-affiliated offices. Iraqi Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani described the official visit of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani to Ankara as "valuable and positive," words that would have been unthinkable only a year ago (Kerkuk.net, March 17).

The United States, as well as all other nations affected by terrorism, actually has a considerable stake in this joint effort against the PKK's criminal activities, in that success against the PKK will serve as a template for similar campaigns against other terrorist groups that have similar architecture. Al-Qaeda, for example, also has a "distributed" structure similar to that of the PKK, with key personnel, facilities, functions and interests in a large number of nations around the world. Moving funds to where they are necessary then becomes even more essential to al-Qaeda than, for example, to a group such as Peru's Sendero Luminoso, isolated in a single valley in Peru. Maintaining watch, therefore, on Turkey's efforts to combat PKK drug trafficking will be well worth the time and effort for many nations combating the fundraising activities of their own terrorist groups.

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## Rotation of Coalition Forces Brings New Hope to Helmand Province

By Waliullah Rahmani

**W**ith the onset of a wide operation against the Taliban in Garmsir district of Helmand province, once again the lawless Helmand

province has become the focus of national and international circles. On April 30, the U.S. Marines announced they had recaptured Garmsir district from Taliban control and entered governmental buildings (BBC Persian.com, April 30). Since this operation was launched, at least 10 insurgents have been reported killed or injured every day during the Marines' operations in different areas of Helmand.

The return of U.S. forces to this volatile southern province has been accompanied by rumors in Helmand and Kabul that the U.S. forces will eventually be replaced by British troops who were in charge of Helmand for the past two years. Such a development would be generally unwelcome in the province. Meanwhile, the redeployment of U.S. troops to Helmand has brought hopes for the betterment of security and easing of the insurgency in at least parts of this neo-Taliban-dominated province. These developments in Helmand over the last two months, however, need to be examined so that there can be a clear vision of where Helmand stands and to distinguish the status of the leading players there.

### The General Situation of Helmand

Following U.S. operations in Garmsir district and raids by NATO forces on Musa Qala and other areas of Helmand, there have been reports that violence has eased in the center of neo-Taliban power. An aware resident of the Nawamish area of Helmand province told Jamestown that in comparison to last year, the movement of the Taliban in Helmand for now is very low and few in number. On the condition of anonymity, the resident said that by the start of the spring and good weather, people were expecting more attacks and violence from the Taliban, but stressed that this year the situation in the province has changed (Author's interview with a Nawamish district resident). Meanwhile, another source who did not want to be named told Jamestown that the general mood and morale of the Taliban is very weak in comparison to last year. He admitted that even in Musa Qala district, once called the Taliban's "university of terror," the insurgents are weak and have lost their power to maneuver (Author's interview). This assessment was confirmed by an Afghan MP from Helmand province, who says that the Taliban's tactic of attack and escape has seen only limited use since the start of 2008 and they have not been successful in putting serious pressure on government forces or international troops. That said, the Taliban are in control of some districts of Helmand and have recently divided into two groups as well. Reports confirm a rift within the local Taliban and say



that in comparison to last year, the Taliban's ability to coordinate in Helmand is in question.

#### Rift within the Helmand Taliban

Among the public in Helmand's Lashkar Gah district there are rumors of a wide rift between the different Taliban groups. In interviews with Jamestown, many residents of Lashkar Gah admitted this rift and said that a high-ranking Taliban official who had recently joined the government was killed by his former comrades. These residents point out that the murder of this influential former Taliban leader—who still had many loyalists among the neo-Taliban of Helmand—caused deep divisions between two groups of insurgents (Author's interviews with Lashkar Gah residents and individuals).

Meanwhile, an Afghan official, on condition of anonymity, admitted the gap between the Taliban forces. He named the murdered influential Taliban leader as Haji Abdur Rahman who had joined the government and was based in the city of Lashkar Gah. He said that recently Haji Abdur Rahman had been on a trip to Marjah district, where he wanted to solve some problems among the Taliban. On his way back to Lashkar Gah city—the provincial capital—a group of Taliban killed him together with his associates.

Meanwhile, there are reports of changes in the Taliban administration of Helmand. The neo-Taliban forces have set up provincial administrations for every province of Afghanistan. For Helmand, the Taliban announced a governor, district chiefs and judges. During the last few years, the Taliban governor of Helmand was someone named Mullah Abdur Rahim Akhund who was appointed to control Helmand and lead the Taliban insurgents there. But now the Taliban have announced the replacement of Mullah Abdur Rahim Akhund with a new governor named Mullah Mistari Akhund. Although the names are fictitious, some sources confirm these changes among the top officials of the local Taliban.

#### The Taliban's Power Base in Helmand

The Taliban's main base of power is now in some districts of Helmand province which were gained by the insurgents during the last two years. On March 3, Amrullah Salih of the National Security Department of Afghanistan confirmed that four districts of Helmand province are still under the control of Taliban insurgents; namely, Deshu, Khanshin, Baghran and Washir (Tolo

TV, March 3). In his March 3 speech in Afghanistan's parliament, the head of the National Security Department of Afghanistan never mentioned the Taliban's control over Garmsir district, which is now controlled by U.S. forces.

Two months after Amrullah Salih's comments, some sources maintain the Taliban still control these provinces. One official said that the districts of Washir, Baghran, Khanshin and Nawzad are not under the control of the Afghan government (Author's interview). Nawzad district has a variety of passages to the western Farah province where insurgent activity has increased in the last year. The districts of Khanshin and Deshu are located on the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan and have many ways into the neighboring country's territory. Khanshin also has routes to the insurgents' bases in the southwestern province of Nimruz.

The Taliban in Helmand can resist government and Coalition forces partly because of the support they receive from either Pakistan or the neighboring Nimruz and Farah provinces. An Afghan MP from Helmand, Niamathullah Ghafari, told Jamestown that whenever the Taliban feel themselves to be under pressure, they escape to Farah, Nimruz or Pakistan. According to Ghafari, the Taliban's control over these four districts of Helmand is due to the fact that they have never been confined to these districts (Author's interview with Ghafari).

#### The Taliban's Chain of Command

In Helmand the Taliban are reported to be controlled by Mullah Berader Akhund, the deputy of Mullah Omar. Although it is not confirmed whether Berader is directly engaged in the planning, coordination and implementation processes of the insurgents' operations against the government and international forces, it is clear that he has been given the power to be the core commander of the Taliban in the provinces of Helmand, Kandahar and Oruzgan.

Aside from Mullah Berader, some residents of the Nad Ali district of Helmand province say that they have heard Mullah Naqib Akhund is back at the frontlines in Helmand. This claim has not been confirmed, as it was recently announced that Mullah Naqib was injured and arrested by government forces and was supposedly in prison. The other well-known commanders of the Helmand Taliban are said to be the aforementioned former Taliban governor of Helmand, Mullah Abdur

Rahim Akhund, and his replacement, Mullah Mistari Akhund.

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Helmand Public Opinion of Afghan and International Forces in Helmand

The majority of Helmandis appear to be optimistic about the performance of the Afghan National Army (ANA) in Helmand province. The ANA forces have been widely welcomed by different groups of Helmand citizens who are supportive of these forces (Author's interview with many residents of Lashkar Gah city). Some people said that the National Army forces were doing their duty in accordance with Afghan culture and traditions. Many people, however, were negative regarding the performance of that part of the Afghan Police forces called the "Helping Police." These police forces were deployed during the last two years, but it is reported that the new governor of Helmand province has removed most of the so-called "Helping Police," whom the people claim are mostly drug addicts and members of criminal groups.

Meanwhile, Helmand MP Niamathullah Ghafari told Jamestown that most of Helmand's citizens are happier with the Afghan forces than the British troops. He added that the people also have a good opinion of the U.S. forces.

According to Ghafari, many Helmandis know that four decades ago the Americans built a great deal of infrastructure in Helmand. They point to the work done by Americans in Lashkar Gah city, including the U.S.-built school and hospital and the U.S.-built Bughra dam. On the other hand, many still have negative impressions of the British occupation of Afghanistan, particularly during the period of the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-80).

In what was once called the center of the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan, there are at most 3,000 Taliban insurgents still in the field. The current situation in Helmand is expected to improve in comparison to that of the last two years. There are expectations that with the redeployment of U.S. troops and nearly 6,000 Afghan National Police and ANA to Helmand, the insurgency and related violence will ease in the near future.

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