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## The Pakistan Frontier Corps in the War on Terrorism – Part One

By Tariq Mahmud Ashraf

Pakistan’s first line of defense against insurgent forces in its loosely-ruled western frontier region is not Pakistan’s regular army, but a long-neglected, locally raised paramilitary. A remnant of the British colonial era, the paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC) has been maintained and stationed in Pakistan’s North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Baluchistan province by the government of Pakistan since independence.

Although the FC is a paramilitary organization led and commanded by officers from the regular Pakistan Army, the oversight of FC-NWFP and FC-Baluchistan rests with the federal Ministry of the Interior. The FC formations in the two provinces are separate administrative and functional entities with each commanded by a serving major general from the Pakistan Army. While FC-NWFP is headquartered at Peshawar, FC-Baluchistan is based in Quetta. The Pakistan government ascribes the following roles to FC-NWFP and FC-Baluchistan:

- Frontier Corps, North Western Frontier Province (NWFP): Anti-smuggling measures, maintenance of law and order and drug control along the borders with Afghanistan and in the federally administered tribal areas (FATA) of the NWFP
- Frontier Corps – Baluchistan: Anti-smuggling measures, maintenance of law & order and drug control along the Baluchistan border

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As is apparent from these assigned tasks, the FC elements in both provinces are essentially border security forces with the additional responsibility of maintaining law and order—the latter being a function that is usually assigned to the police. This dichotomy flows from the fact that even to this day, neither the Constitution of Pakistan nor the Pakistan Penal Code are applicable in Pakistan's tribal areas, which continue to be administered in accordance with the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR), promulgated by the British more than a century ago.<sup>1</sup> In an important move aimed at addressing this anomaly, Pakistan's new Prime Minister Yousef Raza Gilani has announced the revocation of the FCR—a move that has been widely welcomed (with some reservations) in the FATA (*Daily Times* [Lahore], March 30). Although the precise modalities of the revocation of the FCR are still awaited, there is a distinct possibility that the “maintenance of law and order” function of the FC will be taken away and entrusted to the Police Department. Such a step would result in the FC reverting to its primary role of providing border security along the Pakistan-Afghanistan and Pakistan-Iran borders in the NWFP and Baluchistan.

In addition to the assigned roles, the FC has been increasingly involved in the War against Terrorism that has engulfed Pakistan's border regions in the aftermath of the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan. This task, though not within the operational capabilities and assigned role of the FC, has served to usher it into prominence worldwide.

In this first part of a two-part study, the historical background of the FC and its structure will be discussed, as will be the events prior to September 2001. The second part will recount the events following the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan and deal specifically with the role that has been played by the FC in the War against Terrorism.

## Historical Background

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<sup>1</sup> The Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) comprises a set of laws enforced by the British in the Pashtun-inhabited tribal areas of north-west British India. They were specially devised to counter the fierce opposition of the Pashtuns to British rule, and their main objective was to protect the interests of the British Empire. The FCR dates back to the occupation of the six Pashtun-inhabited frontier districts by the British in 1848. The regulation was re-enacted in 1873 and again in 1876, with minor modifications. With the passage of time, the regulation was found to be inadequate and new acts and offenses were added to it to extend its scope. This was done through promulgation of the Frontier Crimes Regulation 1901.

The fiery and weapons-savvy Pashtuns inhabiting the western frontiers of Pakistan are a fascinating group. Proud, honorable, indomitable and hospitable are some of the terms that immediately come to mind whenever one delves into a discussion regarding them. Their warrior-like ethos and fierce independence precluded even the British from ever fully subjugating them prior to Britain's ultimate departure from India in 1947. In an effort to regulate and administer the unruly tribesmen of the region, the British resorted to establishing local militias in the tribal belt with a tribal and ethnic flavor. The first such paramilitary outfit—the Khyber Rifles—was created in 1878, followed by the Zhob Militia in 1883, the Kurram Militia in 1892, the Tochi Scouts in 1894, the Chagai Militia in 1896, the South Waziristan Scouts in 1900 and the Chitral Scouts in 1903. The primary roles assigned to these units were to guard the border and curb smuggling. While virtually the entire fighting strength of these units was recruited from the local Pashtun tribesmen, the command and control of the FC remained vested in British officers of the pre-independence Indian Army (PakDef.info, November 2001).

These paramilitary outfits were administratively united under the Frontier Corps by Lord Curzon in 1907, with its headquarters located in the Balahisar Fort in Peshawar. By 1947 the FC had become a large force looking after the area from the Karakoram in the North to the Mekran Coast in the South—an area of responsibility well over 2,500 miles in length. Therefore, it was decided to divide the FC into two administrative units: FC NWFP and FC Baluchistan. While the Pakistan government opted to retain the structure and role of the FC even after independence, it expanded the force substantially by creating a host of new units including Thall Scouts, Northern Scouts, Bajaur Scouts, Karakoram Scouts, Kalat Scouts, Dir Scouts and Kohistan Scouts.

## Structure and Organization

Immediately after the creation of the FC in 1907, an officer with the rank of lieutenant colonel was appointed as its inspecting officer and commander. Subsequent expansion of the FC saw this post being upgraded to the rank of a brigadier by 1947 and to that of a major general in 1978. As things exist today, the administrative components of FC-NWFP and FC Baluchistan are headed by serving major generals from the Pakistan Army. Major General Muhammad Alam Khattak is the current inspector general of the FC NWFP, while Major General Salim Nawaz commands FC Baluchistan. The

entire officer cadre for the FC is provided by regular Pakistan Army officers who are deployed with the FC for a two- to three-year period under a scheme called Extra-Regimental Employment (ERE). Career-conscious Army officers generally view such deployment with disdain since it not only takes them away from their mainstream career in the Army, but also exposes them to the endemic corruption that is associated with the FC because of its involvement in anti-smuggling operations.

Interestingly, despite being split into two province-based administrative set-ups, the majority of FC manpower still continues to be recruited from amongst the Pashtun tribesmen hailing from the FATA in the NWFP. This has created problems for the FC elements deployed in Baluchistan, where the locals view them as outsiders (*Dawn* [Karachi], July 22). Currently, the basic training of all FC recruits is conducted at the FC Training Wing located at Mir Ali in North Waziristan.

The current strength of the FC is approximately 85,000 personnel, with FC NWFP numbering 55,000 and FC Baluchistan having a strength of 30,000. Organizationally, these troops are divided into the following sub-units:

FC NWFP

- Chitral Scouts
- Khyber Rifles
- Kurram Militia
- South Waziristan Scouts
- Tochi Scouts
- Mahsud Scouts
- Mohmand Rifles
- Shawal Rifles
- Swat Scouts
- Orakzai Scouts
- Khushal Khan Scouts
- Dir Scouts
- Bajaur Scouts
- Thall Scouts

FC Baluchistan

- Zhob Militia
- Chaghai Militia
- Sibi Scouts
- Kalat Scouts
- Makran Militia
- Kharan Rifles
- Pishin Scouts
- Maiwind Rifles
- Ghazaband Scouts
- Bambore Rifles
- Loralai Scouts
- Mahsud Scouts
- Mohmand Rifles
- Shawal Rifles

Equipment, Training and Conditions of Service

The FC has traditionally been subjected to neglect and inattention since Pakistan’s independence. This neglect has impacted all aspects of its operational capacity and military potential. Considering this force to be essentially a police and anti-smuggling element, the Pakistan Army has never deigned to equip and train its manpower on

the lines of the regular army. The fact that oversight of the FC rests with the Ministry of the Interior and not the Ministry of Defense has also contributed to the Corps being relegated in importance and priority. Another cause of the Pakistan Army’s lack of attention toward the FC emanates from the Army’s India-phobic outlook, which forces it to concentrate only on the eastern frontiers with the relatively threat-free western borders being accorded much less importance (BBC, May 9, 2003).

Till quite recent times, FC troops were equipped with World War II-vintage bolt action rifles and even now continue to don the traditional shalwar–kamiz as a uniform, having no alternate dress that could serve the requirements of battle fatigues. FC troops had little in the way of armor-protection equipment—such as helmets—relied on obsolete or non-existent communications equipment and possessed an extremely limited range of military transportation vehicles (RFE/RL, November 20, 2007).

The troops in the FC are paid significantly less than their colleagues in the regular Pakistan Army and are also denied some of the benefits that are available to the regular army personnel. Despite being dispersed over rugged and inhospitable terrain which necessitates rapid mobility, the FC has no air element of its own and has to rely entirely on the Aviation Corps of the regular Army for any air support, including critical medical evacuations and logistical support.

Other than the structural and organizational impediments highlighted above, there are several functional constraints emanating from the peculiar cultural and religious tribal ethos of the tribesmen that make up a major part of the FC. Most of these constraints have surfaced as a consequence of the events that the FATA and its inhabitants have experienced during the past two decades.

The Frontier Corps in FATA Society

The FATA tribesmen which make up the FC belong to a very conservative and religious society. Their tribal links and connections bind them strongly to the inhabitants of the FATA. While there is an advantage in having FC troops speak the same language as the tribesmen and be familiar with the harsh topography of the region, it is also an impediment when the same FC troops are ordered to take action against members of the same tribe to which they themselves belong.

After successive Pakistani governments over the past six decades ignored the social development of the FATA, a lack of educational facilities provided an opportunity for the religiously inclined to set up religious seminaries or madrassas in the region. These madrassas mushroomed during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan with Saudi funding and U.S. acquiescence. Since the madrassas were the only educational institutions available in the FATA, most of the youth were exposed to religious education from the beginning of their schooling careers. Studying at these madrassas further strengthened the religious and conservative nature of these tribal youth (see *Terrorism Focus*, March 14, 2006).

The FC has been confronted with the problem of lack of continuity at the senior leadership level since all its officers are drawn from the Pakistan Army and serve only one rotation lasting two to three years. The fact that a majority of these officers belong to Punjab and other provinces of Pakistan and are unfamiliar with local social, cultural and linguistic peculiarities also creates problems (ANI, June 1; see also *Terrorism Monitor*, March 29, 2007).

The level of training of the FC has, to say the least, been of an appalling standard. Newly recruited youths who are already fairly familiar with weapons usage are imparted training regarding the rudiments of drill and parade but not much beyond that. The prime reason for this is the belief amongst the officers of the regular Pakistan Army that the FC is essentially a police force and not a military entity per se.

While the idea behind recruiting local tribal youth for the FC units is sound, it lost relevance when the FC troops belonging to the tribal areas of the NWFP were deployed in substantial numbers in the province of Baluchistan. Being foreign to the area, these troops faced a great deal of hostility from natives who considered them to be intruders.

A sizeable number of FATA tribesmen were involved in the resistance against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. On returning to Pakistan, these mujahideen were not only better trained in the art of warfare than the FC but were also better equipped. These factors had a significant demoralizing impact on the FC troops.

The Afghan struggle against the Soviets attracted a considerable number of fighters from the Middle East, Central Asia and other Muslim regions to the tribal agencies. After the ouster of the Soviets from

Afghanistan, a substantial number of these mujahideen opted to marry into the FATA tribes and settle down rather than returning to their respective homelands. The proliferation of religious seminaries, the settlement of foreign mujahideen in FATA and the ease and ready availability of modern weaponry all have an influence on shaping the convictions of FATA youth prior to joining the FC.

### Conclusion

As can be discerned from the above discussion, the FC has been faced with a plethora of weaknesses and deficiencies. The tumultuous events of September 2001, which were to radically alter the regional scenario, found this force faced with several serious deficiencies and obstacles which required tackling before this sizeable force could be brought into play in the War against Terrorism in an effective manner. The events after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, their impact on the FC and the role that the FC has played in the region since then will be covered in part two of this article.

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## Empowering “Soft” Taliban Over “Hard” Taliban: Pakistan’s Counter-Terrorism Strategy

By Sadia Sulaiman

The phenomenal rise of various Pakistani Taliban militant groups since 2004 and subsequent militant activities in both Pakistan and Afghanistan have surprised many. In a short span of nearly three years, the Pakistani Taliban threat has developed into a considerable political and security challenge to both Pakistan and Afghanistan. The presence of figures from al-Qaeda’s senior leadership and other foreign militant groups in the North Waziristan Agency, South Waziristan Agency and Bajaur Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan has provided enormous support to various Pakistani Taliban groups in the shape of ideological, strategic, tactical and logistical assistance, particularly in the development of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and suicide bombings.

The formation of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in December 2007 by various Taliban groups effectively brought together 27 Taliban groups under one umbrella. The union was viewed as an attempt to pursue Talibanization in Pakistan while conducting a “defensive jihad” against Pakistani security forces operating in FATA and the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) (Islam Online, March 6). Baitullah Mahsud, who heads the TTP, is blamed for most of the suicide attacks and terrorist violence in FATA, NWFP and Punjab province in 2007. Mahsud is also accused of involvement in the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in December 2007.

#### A New Alliance in Waziristan

On June 30, Mullah Nazir, commander of the Taliban of the Ahmadzai Wazir Tribe of South Waziristan, and Hafiz Gul Bahadur Wazir, leader of the Taliban of the Uthmanzai Wazir and Daur Tribes of North Waziristan, announced the merger of their groups under a common front, the “Local Taliban Movement,” to fight ISAF-NATO and U.S. forces in Afghanistan (Islam Online, July 13; *Dawn* [Karachi], July 1). Subsequently, Hafiz Gul Bahadur was appointed as the overall commander of both the Ahmadzai and Uthmanzai Taliban, Mullah Nazir as the deputy commander and Mufti Abu Haroon as the spokesman of the group (*The News* [Islamabad], July 13). The formation of the Bahadur-Nazir alliance could be aptly described as a “Waziri alliance” since both Nazir and Bahadur belong to the dominant Wazir Tribe, which nearly encircles the Mahsud Tribe from three sides in Waziristan. As stated by Mullah Nazir, the group has been formed to “defend the Wazir Tribe’s interests in North and South Waziristan” (*Daily Times*, July 2).

It is, however, generally believed that the bloc was formed as an attempt to counter Baitullah Mahsud and his TTP. As stated by a pro-Mullah Nazir tribal elder who attended a *jirga* (tribal council) to ratify the Nazir-Bahadur agreement, the move aims at allowing the two leaders to “forge unity against Mahsud” (*Daily Times* [Lahore], July 8). The agreement comes against a backdrop of increasing terrorist activity by the Baitullah Mahsud-led TTP against the Pakistani government as well as militant raids in June to punish the pro-government Hajji Turkistan group from the neighboring Bhattani tribe. Both Mullah Nazir and Hafiz Gul Bahadur are pro-government and shun terrorist activities within Pakistan.

The biggest point of contention between Mullah Nazir and Baitullah Mahsud is the support the latter provides local Uzbek militants belonging to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The dispute can be traced back to March 2007, when Nazir purged the Uzbek militants along with their local supporters from the Ahmadzai Wazir’s tribal territory following accusations they had violated local customs and traditions and indulged in the killing of tribal elders. These Uzbek militants and their local supporters took refuge with Baitullah Mahsud and continued to carry out attacks against Mullah Nazir and his key commanders. Simultaneous attacks were conducted against Mullah Nazir and Commander Malik Khanan on January 7, killing eight militants and injuring three others (BBC, January 7). Khanan was eventually killed by suspected Mahsud and Uzbek militants on June 1 (*Dawn*, June 1). The killing of Khanan left Mullah Nazir vulnerable to the threat posed by Baitullah Mahsud. The Waziri alliance, therefore, will help Nazir in strengthening his support base among the Ahmadzai Wazir and restrain the Uzbeks and Mahsud militants from harming him. At the same time, Hafiz Gul Bahadur has expressed his concerns several times about the Uzbek militants’ growing anti-Pakistan activities in North Waziristan.

Nazir and Bahadur, while committed to fighting ISAF-NATO and U.S. forces in Afghanistan, are both against the TTP’s terrorist activities in Pakistan (*Daily Times*, July 2). The policy of Nazir and Bahadur conforms to the broader policy of the Afghan Taliban, who have always advised the Pakistani Taliban to shun fighting Pakistani security forces and focus their energy and resources on Afghanistan (Asia Times Online, May 15, 2007). However, some Taliban militants, especially Baitullah Mahsud, have recently moved closer to al-Qaeda, which advocates conducting terrorist attacks against the Pakistani government and staging global jihad. Mullah Omar, the leader of Afghanistan’s Taliban, has personally disapproved of Baitullah and renounced his relationship with him (Asia Times Online, January 24).

#### Impact of the Formation of the Waziri Alliance

The Waziri alliance will lead to Hafiz Gul Bahadur emerging as the strongest Taliban commander in North and South Waziristan—both in terms of manpower and influence with the Afghan Taliban. Both the Ahmadzai Wazir and Uthmanzai Wazir tribes share a border with Afghanistan’s Khost and Pakita provinces while Baitullah Mahsud’s tribe is landlocked. Hence, Mahsudi Taliban

militants require a safe passage through Waziri territory to conduct cross-border activities in Afghanistan. In the wake of any open hostility between the TTP and the Waziri alliance, the latter could deny the Waziris safe passage to Afghanistan. That is why Baitullah Mahsud distributed pamphlets in North Waziristan assuring Hafiz Gul Bahadur that he will neither oppose him, nor conduct a fight against him (*Dawn*, July 3). The alliance also provides strength to the much-weakened Mullah Nazir and assures him of the needed support if Baitullah Mahsud adopts a threatening posture toward him.

The formation of the Waziri alliance may considerably weaken Baitullah Mahsud and the TTP in North and South Waziristan. The Waziri alliance is presently attempting to woo various Taliban militant groups operating in FATA and NWFP away from the TTP. The Haji Namdar-led Amr bil Maroof wa Nahi Anir Munkir (Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vices) militant group operating in Khyber Agency has reportedly joined the Waziri alliance (*The News*, July 6). Bahadur may also try to attract other non-TTP Taliban militant groups operating in FATA, such as the Shah Khalid group (Mohmand Agency) and the Jaish-e-Islami of Maulvi Wali-ur-Rehman (Bajaur Agency).

#### Isolating Baitullah Mahsud

There are prospects that the Waziri alliance may also bring the pro-government Hajji Turkistan group of the Bhattani Tribe into its fold. The Bhattani Tribe borders the Mahsud Tribe to its east and provides the latter land passage to the southern districts of NWFP. While the infamous Asmatullah Shaheen group of the Bhattani tribe has joined the TTP, the rival Turkistan group faced an armed onslaught from the TTP militants in June that left nearly 40 Bhattani tribesmen dead. The Mahsud tribe and its Taliban fighters face a complete blockade if the Ahmadzai, Uthmanzai and Bhattani tribes join their ranks in the wake of any aggression by the Mahsuds against one of them.

There is a chance some of the dissenting Mahsud Taliban commanders may join hands with the Waziri alliance, thereby weakening the base of Baitullah Mahsud within his own tribe. The Uzbeks may also come under tremendous pressure from both Nazir and Bahadur. Baitullah Mahsud has a significant number of Uzbek militants in his ranks and any change of loyalty on the part of Uzbek militants from Baitullah to Nazir and Bahadur in an attempt to safeguard their survival may effectively erode Baitullah's fighting capabilities in

the region. As it becomes embroiled in inter-tribal and intra-tribal cleavages, the TTP may shift its focus away from the Pakistani government for the time being.

What can now be expected is a successful and historically-tested "divide and rule" policy by the Pakistani government, based on pitting one rogue against the other with some concessions offered to the one willing to side with the government. Such a strategy could prove more effective than employing troops and conducting military operations in the volatile frontier region.

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## PKK Kidnappings an Isolated Initiative or a New European Strategy?

By Gareth Jenkins

The seizure in eastern Turkey on July 8 of three German mountaineers by a unit of the People's Defense Force (HPG), the armed wing of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), was the first time in more than a decade that the organization had kidnapped Western tourists. The kidnapping is believed to have been a reaction to a crackdown by the German authorities on pro-PKK media outlets in Germany and appears to indicate a new willingness to explicitly target nationals of countries whose governments are regarded as being hostile to the organization.

The three mountaineers, all male, were members of a group of 13 who had arrived in eastern Turkey on July 6 to climb the 5,137-meter high Mount Ararat. They received a permit from the Turkish authorities and were accompanied by a Turkish guide. At around 10 PM local time on July 8, after setting up base camp at around 3,200 meters, the group was approached by five HPG militants, who delivered a lecture in broken English on the PKK's armed struggle before kidnapping three of the

climbers at gunpoint.

Following their release, the three mountaineers said that the militants were part of a 15-member HPG unit. For 12 days, their captors forced them to march at night and conceal themselves during their day, before releasing them unharmed on July 20. (Firat News Agency, July 22).

### German Crackdown on Roj TV

On July 9, the HPG released a statement via the pro-PKK Firat News Agency (based in the Netherlands), confirming that its members had “detained” the three German mountaineers and vowing not to release them until Germany abandoned its “hostile policy against the Kurdish people and the PKK” (Firat News Agency, July 9).

The statement appears to have been referring to a recent German crackdown on organizations affiliated with the pro-PKK Roj TV television channel. Roj TV has been based in Denmark since March 1, 2004, operating under a license granted by Danish authorities and broadcasting via satellite to both the Kurdish diaspora in Europe and the Kurdish minorities in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. Roj TV also had production companies in other European countries, including Belgium and Germany.

On May 7, German police raided premises belonging to the locally-registered Viko Fernseh Produktion GmbH in the western city of Wuppertal. Viko was responsible for supplying Roj TV with a number of programs, including the daily “Good Morning, Kurdistan” (*Der Spiegel*, July 13). On June 19, the German Interior Ministry dissolved Viko and confiscated all of its assets. It also prohibited Mesopotamia Broadcast A/S, Roj TV’s parent company, from all activity in Germany (Deutsche Press-Agentur, June 24).

### The PKK in Germany

There are estimated to be around 500,000 ethnic Kurds living in Germany. The PKK itself has been officially outlawed in the country since November 23, 1993. The ban followed a series of attacks by the organization’s supporters on Turkish-owned properties in Germany on November 4, 1993, in which some 60 travel agencies, banks and restaurants were vandalized and one person killed.

Until recently, the ban was only strictly enforced on the PKK itself. Many of its support organizations were allowed to operate with relative impunity. The PKK continues to recruit Kurds living in Germany—and occasionally even ethnic Germans—to join its armed struggle against Turkey. However, it usually prefers to draw on Kurds living in rural areas inside Turkey and, to a lesser extent, in Syria and Iraq, as local recruits adapt more easily to the often arduous living conditions in the battlegrounds of the mountains of southeast Turkey. From the PKK’s perspective, the main importance of the Kurdish diaspora in Germany is its potential for fund-raising and propaganda.

In addition to conducting fund-raising events, the PKK levies regular financial contributions from sympathizers in the Kurdish community in Germany which, together with income from activities such as narcotics trafficking, are believed to be the organization’s main source of financial support. German authorities estimate that contributions from PKK sympathizers in the country generate revenue of at least \$15 million a year, some of which is channeled into propaganda activities and some into the armed struggle itself (*Der Spiegel*, July 13).

Since returning to violence in June 2004 after a five-year respite, the PKK has been careful to avoid antagonizing European countries for fear of triggering a crackdown on its support organizations in Europe and in the hope of eventually reversing the 2002 decision to include the PKK on the EU’s list of proscribed terrorist organizations. During its first insurgency in 1984-1999, the PKK explicitly targeted visitors to Turkey, killing and injuring foreign tourists in a series of bombings in an attempt to damage one of Turkey’s main sources of foreign currency. During the early and mid-1990s, the PKK also kidnapped foreign tourists in southeast Turkey, including 19 seized in eight separate incidents on July 5, 1993. In each case, the foreign tourists were well-treated and eventually released unharmed.

In a statement issued after the three German mountaineers were released on July 20, the HPG declared that it always abided by the Geneva Convention and that, to date, the PKK “had not engaged, and would not engage, in any attack or initiative targeting civilians” (Firat News Agency, July 21). This is disingenuous. Since returning to violence in June 2004, the PKK has pursued a two-front strategy, combining a rural insurgency in southeast Turkey with a bombing campaign against civilian targets, including foreign tourists, in the west of the country. Over the last four years, the bombing

campaign has killed around 35 people—including seven foreign tourists—and injured several hundred more. However, the PKK has attempted to distance itself from the bombing campaign by maintaining that it was carried out by an autonomous group of hard-line Kurdish nationalists known as the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK). In reality, TAK militants are trained in the PKK's camps in the Qandil mountains of northern Iraq and dispatched to western Turkey with explosives supplied by the organization (see *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, September 7, 2007). In recent years, the PKK has occasionally seized Turkish civilians and members of the Turkish security forces, but until the raid of July 8 it had not kidnapped any foreigners since the 1990s.

#### Change in Strategy or Individual Initiative?

In a July 21 statement, the HPG repeated an earlier claim that the unit which seized the three German mountaineers had been acting on its own initiative (Firat News Agency, July 21). For reasons which are not immediately clear, the statement has been used by the pro-government Turkish media as proof that the kidnapping was ordered by Fehman Hussein, the commander of the HPG, without the knowledge or consent of the head of the PKK's Executive Committee, Murat Karayilan, who is subsequently reported to have demanded Hussein be executed for irrevocably alienating the German government (*Today's Zaman*, July 16).

Claims of internal divisions within the PKK and reports of the deaths of both Hussein and Karayilan appear regularly in the Turkish media. Although it is possible that there are tensions between Hussein and Karayilan, most such reports are probably part of a disinformation campaign by Turkish authorities to try to undermine the PKK's morale. Given the PKK's often draconian response to insubordination within its own ranks, it is highly unlikely that a single HPG unit commander would have decided to kidnap foreigners without explicit authorization. The alacrity with which the HPG issued a statement confirming the kidnapping and demanding concessions from the German authorities appears to confirm that the operation received prior approval from the high command.

In fact, contrary to the claims of the Turkish media, the kidnapping was consistent with an abrupt hardening in PKK rhetoric after German authorities outlawed Roj TV. In late June, the PKK Executive Committee issued a statement warning that "it is the German Government which is responsible for all the resulting

negative consequences of this policy," calling on Berlin to abandon "its hostile policy against the Kurdish people and its liberation movement" (*Der Spiegel*, July 13). The phrasing was almost identical to the statement issued by the HPG after the mountaineers had been seized.

At the beginning of July, Turkish police forwarded intelligence reports to the German Federal Office of Criminal Investigation (Bundeskriminalamt - BKA) indicating that there was a possibility of attacks and kidnappings against German citizens. On July 2, the BKA sent messages to the interior ministries of the 16 German states warning of possible attacks and kidnappings against Germans in Turkey (*Der Spiegel*, July 13).

#### Conclusion

It is unlikely the PKK leadership expected the seizure of the three mountaineers would force the German government to lift the ban on Roj TV. The kidnappings were probably mainly designed to generate publicity and serve as a defiant demonstration of the organization's strength, not only to the German government but also to the PKK's Kurdish constituency. The PKK is aware that it is never going to defeat the Turkish security forces on the battlefield. Since resuming its insurgency in June 2004, the PKK has used violence to try to pressure the Turkish authorities into granting Kurds greater political and cultural rights and to assert itself as the main representative of the country's Kurdish minority. It will have been aware that many of its current and potential supporters in the Kurdish diaspora in Germany would have regarded mere verbal protests as an inadequate response to the closure of Roj TV. It is also possible that the PKK believed that the kidnappings would serve as a deterrent, both against further measures against its support groups inside Germany and against similar attempts by governments in other countries.

The PKK is unlikely to have intended—as it threatened—to hold the three German mountaineers until there was a change in German government policy. In announcing the mountaineers' release, the Turkish authorities claimed that the hostages were freed when the HPG unit was forced to abandon them after being encircled by Turkish security forces (NTV, CNNTurk, Anadolu Ajansi, July 20). In contrast, the HPG declared that it had already agreed to release the three climbers to representatives of human rights groups and the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) at 8:00 PM on July 20, but that



the approach of Turkish military units had resulted in them bringing the time forward to 12:00 PM to avoid the possibility of the hostages being caught in a firefight (Firat News Agency, July 21). What is known is that, when it kidnapped foreigners during the 1990s, the PKK always eventually released them unharmed, apparently in return for the publicity their detention had generated rather than for any concessions from the authorities. It currently remains unclear whether the kidnapping of the mountaineers is likely to be a one-off reaction to the German crackdown on Roj TV or whether further kidnappings of Germans or other foreign nationals are likely to follow.

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## The Global Repercussions of Nigeria's Niger Delta Insurgency

By Akpobibibo Onduku

The “oilfield” wars in Nigeria’s Delta region have been in the international spotlight from the emergence of the Ken Saro-Wiwa-led Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in 1990 to the current insurgency led by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). This latter group is known for its tactic of hostage-taking and its frequent clashes with the Nigerian military. The activities of MEND have greatly influenced peak global oil prices with consequences for production capacities and consumption.

### A Loosely Organized Insurgency

Many Niger Deltans claim that the region has been neglected, marginalized and cheated by the oil industry and Nigeria’s federal government for nearly five decades. In their view the oil resource endowment has brought only military occupation, environmental degradation and deterioration of the aquatic habitats in the region. Travels across the region reveal many people living in primitive conditions despite the presence of modern day technology all around them. In Nigeria’s Delta, the MEND group is one among many insurgent organizations that have come to the fore to confront the Federal Government of Nigeria for the perceived injustices done to the people of the region. Interviews with organizers of the recent London protests against

Britain’s offer of military counter-insurgency assistance to Nigeria reveal that MEND is a highly coordinated but largely faceless organization composed of clusters of small groups with no single or distinct structured leadership (*The Guardian* [Lagos], July 20).

The most prominent name attached to the MEND leadership is that of Comrade Jomo Gbomo, who acted as the online spokesman and apparent leader of the group. In September 2007, Henry Okah, an alleged Nigerian gunrunner and occasional Niger Delta political activist, was arrested in Angola and extradited to Nigeria to face charges of treason and gunrunning. The Nigerian government maintained that Okah was the real Jomo Gbomo and had been running MEND’s insurgency from the safety of South Africa. To confuse the issue, emails continued to be issued from a MEND spokesman using the name Jomo Gbomo that insisted the imprisoned Okah was a victim of mistaken identity. Okah’s identification with Gbomo was later confirmed by his wife and other militant sources. MEND now demands the release of Okah as a condition for negotiations.

A careful look at the various activities of MEND reveals that there are two distinct groups in the Rivers and Bayelsa States of the Niger Delta (*The Sunday Sun* [Lagos], July 20). Both groups seem to be consistent in attacking the policies of the federal government but not those of their state governments, led by the Hon. Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi and Chief Timipre Sylva respectively.

### Asari-Dokubo and the Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force

MEND is closely tied to Alhaji Mujahid Asari-Dokubo’s Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force (NDPVF). In October 2004, the NDPVF declared a military offensive tagged “Operation Locust Feast” against the oil multinationals and the Nigerian security forces in response to the alleged aerial bombing of its bases with chemicals by military helicopters.<sup>1</sup> This ultimatum led to a sharp and immediate rise in oil prices on international markets. The NDPVF, like MEND and other local insurgent groups, are accused of financing their operations through the practice of “bunkering,” a euphemism for oil theft from the pipelines that cross the Delta region (the term originally referred to the process of filling a ship with oil or coal). A convert to Islam, the

<sup>1</sup> Robert Chesal, Nigerian Rebels Push Oil to a Record (Radio Netherlands interview with Anslem Okolo), September 28, 2004

NDPVF leader is a former president of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) who was arrested and detained by the former President Olusegun Obasanjo administration on the charge of treason. Asari-Dokubo was released from prison during the current regime of President Umaru Yar'Adua, partly due to intervention from his kinsman, Vice President Dr. Goodluck Jonathan. Asari-Dokubo recently responded angrily to accusations that the Delta region's leaders bore some responsibility for regional development problems as a result of having squandered government funds allocated to the area. Describing northerners as "parasites" who live off the Delta's oil revenues, the NDPVF leader declared: "Nothing will stop us until we control our resources. Most of these Northern people think they are gods. They are flesh and we are flesh. They have blood and we have blood. They should not try us, because we are waiting for them. They are stealing our oil and they are still talking. How many Niger Delta people have oil blocks? How many Niger Delta people have licenses to lift oil? How many Niger Delta people have oil concessions?" (*The Daily Sun* [Lagos], July 21).

A non-violent Ijaw advocacy group that has often differed with MEND is the Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC), led by Dr. Bello Oboko from its headquarters in Oporoza. FNDIC has been in the forefront of the fight against what it describes as political, economic and environmental injustices in the Warri Local Government Areas of Delta State as well as championing Ijaw interests in the Warri region of Delta State. The Ijaw are an indigenous group of over 12 million people, found mainly in the Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo and Rivers states of Nigeria's Delta region.

### Insurgents and Government Accuse Each Other of Terrorism

In light of the region's oil-based conflict, the word terrorism has become more and more often associated with analysis of the Niger Delta. In many instances, state officials and the oil industry have described the activities of the youth and ethnic militias as terrorist acts and therefore have urged security outfits to deal with them as such. MEND spokesman Jomo Gbomo refuted allegations of any connection between MEND and al-Qaeda: "It is ridiculous to imagine Christians in the south of Nigeria, fighting against a glaring injustice will be aligned to Islamic groups thousands of miles away. There is simply no connection. Whenever the US government intends to meddle in the internal affairs of

countries, suspicion of an al-Qaeda connection is usually a preferred reason for its involvement" (Saharareporters.com, March 30, 2007).

The concept of "eco-terrorism" was brought to the fore by FNDIC leader Dr. Bello Oboko during a recent interview with the author. Eco-terrorism goes beyond the common perception that terrorist activities consist solely of political assassinations, violent political revolutions and bombings to include various forms of violence and sabotage committed in the name of the environment. Dr. Oboko argues that the oil companies are also terrorists for their "inhuman and environmentally devastating activities" such as running oil at high pressure through old and outdated pipelines that give rise to explosions, destroying the surrounding environment. Industry calls for security support have led to the militarization of oil flow stations and have been a factor in inter- and intra-communal conflicts. The oil firms have also been accused of providing logistical assistance to the military in attacking local village communities in the Niger Delta.

Many of the insurgent groups claim to have arisen to give a voice to the people's sufferings in the hands of the Nigerian security forces and the oil firms. The environmental group Environmental Rights Action (ERA), with headquarters in Benin City, Nigeria, asserted that the voices of local Niger Deltans have been muffled in most cases because they do not have access to the media and the laws are not in their favor. ERA has also accused Chevron of supplying helicopters for use by government forces in attacks on the Opia and Ikenyan Ijaw communities.<sup>2</sup> Similar cases have been reported from across the Niger Delta.

### International Impact

The activities of the Niger Delta insurgent groups have had a great influence in pushing global oil prices even higher. MEND has always claimed to have the ability to take on the military might of the federal government of Nigeria. With claims of large numbers of volunteer fighters in their camps, the militants have taken to destroying flow stations and other industrial installations. Expatriates working in the oil industry continue to be victims of kidnapping and many oil companies have relocated to neighboring African countries due to the region's insecurity. Although Nigeria

<sup>2</sup> Environmental Rights Action, "Chevron Commandos Raid Hapless Villagers," in *Environmental Testimonies*, Benin City, ERA/FOEN, 2000

is the world's eighth largest oil exporter, the bombings of oil platforms and kidnappings of oil workers have cut Nigerian production by a fifth since early 2006, helping push world oil prices to record highs.

A MEND spokesman using the name Jomo Gbomo urged President Yar'Adua in a recent online interview to show the same enthusiasm and action in dealing with the developmental challenges facing the Delta region as he has in soliciting military support from Britain. According to Gbomo: "As a group, we are embarrassed that the Nigerian armed forces have to beg the UK for help to fight us. If the country was invaded by Cameroun, are they going to wait for the UK before defending the country?" (*The Guardian* [Lagos], July 18). MEND claims the whole military institution is a fraud and questions what has happened to all the overseas military training and weapons that have been purchased since Nigeria's independence in 1960.

The group has urged Britain and its Prime Minister Gordon Brown not to cooperate with President Yar'Adua's reported appeals for military support to stem illegal oil theft in the Niger Delta, saying the real "bunkerers" are made up of the military and a wide range of Nigerians. Following a state visit last week to London by President Yar'Adua, a presidential advisor described any suggestion that Nigeria was seeking British military aid as "unfounded," adding: "I wonder where some people got the idea that the government is adopting a military option to tackle the problem" (*This Day* [Lagos/Abuja], July 23).

In the event of a full-scale attack on the insurgents by Nigerian forces, a spokesperson for the Joint Revolutionary Council (representing MEND, the NDPVF and the Martyrs' Brigade) warns: "If they attack our units, then all the Bantustan states of the Niger Delta must be ready to declare 24 hour curfews because we will take aim on every living thing that carries the banner of the armed forces of the Nigerian state. Every soldier of the Nigerian state (not their families) will bear the brunt of any attack on our units. We have committed ourselves to death if and when it comes. Even an amateur gun man can take an easy aim on loitering soldiers of the Nigerian state. They are every where in the Delta, Rivers and Bayelsa States" (Saharareporters.com, June 21).

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