

# TERRORISM FOCUS

Volume VI ■ Issue 3 ■ January 28, 2009

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### PAKISTANI TALIBAN THREATEN ISRAEL AND PASHTUN NATIONALISTS WITH SUICIDE BOMBERS

Well-pleased with the local “success” of their suicide bombing campaign, the leaders of Pakistan’s Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) are now threatening to send their suicide bombers against Israeli targets and Pakistan’s Pashtun politicians.

In a telephone interview, TTP leader Baitullah Mahsud expressed his anger at Israel’s devastating incursion into Gaza, promising to avenge the Palestinian Muslims for Israel’s “atrocities” (BBC Urdu, January 18). Saying he would teach Israel an “historic lesson,” Baitullah declared his suicide bombers could strike anywhere in the worlds with God’s help (*Daily Times* [Lahore], January 18).

Baitullah’s right-hand man, Hakimullah Mahsud, followed up several days later by threatening to send TTP suicide bombers against leaders of the Pashtun-based Awami National Party (ANP) in response to the government’s offensive in the turbulent Swat region: “We have prepared a hit-list of ANP leaders and activists who will be the target of suicide attacks and gunfire. People must avoid meeting ANP leaders and attending their functions” (*The News* [Islamabad], January 22; *Pak Tribune*, January 24). Hakimullah, the regional TTP commander for the Khyber, Kurram, and Orakzai tribal agencies, has issued similar threats against the ANP before (*The News*, November 27, 2008).

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Led by Asfandyar Wali Khan, the ANP is a secular/left national political party with a stronghold in the Pashtun-dominated North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan. The ANP was a big winner in last year's elections, forming the largest party in the NWFP's ruling coalition and playing a supporting role in the central government coalition in Islamabad (*Pakistan Times*, February 25, 2008; *The Nation* [Islamabad], January 9). Under Asfandyar Wali Khan, the ANP has been a strong opponent of the Taliban, encouraging dialogue with moderate Islamist elements while rejecting Taliban violence. As a result, the movement has been a frequent target of the Taliban, which no doubt feels threatened by the ANP's electoral success. Press reports of Asfandyar Wali Khan visiting U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) headquarters in Tampa Bay in 2006 and 2008 have not endeared the Awami Party leader to the Taliban (*Dawn* [Karachi], May 9, 2008). The militants demand that the ANP immediately implement Shari'a (Islamic law) in the NWFP, release all Taliban prisoners, and pay compensation for losses suffered during government offensives in Swat and elsewhere in the frontier region (*Pak Tribune*, January 24).

#### ARE SLAVIC NEO-PAGANS RUSSIA'S LATEST TERRORIST THREAT?

In recent years Russia has been beset by terrorist activities emanating from familiar sources – ethnic nationalism, radical Islamism, and criminal activity. The latest terrorist threat in Russia, however, may be coming from a completely unexpected direction – Slavic neo-paganism.

Earlier this month, the Federal Security Service (Federalnaya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti - FSB) and Interior Ministry police arrested six members of a group accused of bombing railway facilities and an Orthodox church, attacking foreigners, and planning an attack on a McDonald's restaurant (Interfax, January 19; NTV-MIR [Moscow], January 21). Surprisingly, the young suspects (aged between 17 and 24) were described as belonging to a group that worshipped pre-Christian Slavic deities, part of the Slavic world's growing Rodnoveriy (native faith) movement, which regards Christianity as an unwelcome and alien intrusion into Slavic life.

In Russia the movement has reverberated most with young people who grew up in the post-Soviet period and feel no particular attachment to the long-repressed Orthodox Church. Though its origins can be found in 19th century academic works, modern Russian Neo-paganism has tied itself closely to popular youth culture. Typical of the movement's appeal to youth is the emergence of Arkona, a popular "Slavic pagan metal" band (<http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=8U07boPwbKw>).

The neo-paganists are charged with a number of bombings, including attacks on rail lines near the Tsaricino and Bulatnikovo metro stations (October 5 and November 4, 2008). They are also alleged to have carried out a bombing in an Orthodox church on November 30, 2008, and the January 16 attempted bombing of a McDonald's restaurant near the Kuzminsi metro station (NTV-MIR, January 21; *Moscow Times*, January 22).

A Ministry of Sport official was originally detained in connection with the investigation, but was released due to lack of evidence after it appeared bomb-making materials found in his flat belonged to his cousin, an alleged group member (*Kommersant*, January 21). Yevgenya Zhikhareva, the 17-year-old girl who was alleged to be the group's leader, was also released because of a lack of evidence (*Moscow Times*, January 22). The suspects are charged with involvement in the murder of at least ten foreign nationals and a series of bombings over the period 2008-2009. Moscow police chief Vladimir Pronin reported a total of 47 fatal attacks on non-Slavic foreigners in Moscow last year (*Moscow Times*, January 22).

Since the last traces of Russia's pre-Christian religion were purged in the medieval period (save those elements that had been absorbed into local Christian folk ritual), the modern movement draws heavily on the literary and artistic legacy of Russia's 19th century Romantic movement, which focused on the mythology of an heroic pre-Christian era. Many Rodnovers (as followers are termed) use the allegedly ancient Book of Veles as a sacred text, though most scholars regard the work as a modern forgery (the original text, carved on a series of wooden planks, was lost in World War II). Though some Rodnovers are seeking an authentic religious experience, others are attracted to the movement by its association with extremist nationalism. Given the release of two of the suspects so far, it remains to be seen if neo-paganism poses a new security threat to the Russian Federation.

## Al-Qaeda Leaders in the Arabian Peninsula Speak Out

Jihadi forum members hailed a series of statements by leaders of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), gathered under the title “From Here We Start and in Aqsa [Jerusalem] We Meet” (hanein.info, January 24). The statements, originating in Yemen, came after a long silence and were posted in many jihadi websites. Of particular note were the messages from two ex-Guantanamo Bay prisoners, who have now taken leadership positions in AQAP.

In the first statement, the Deputy General of AQAP, Shaykh Abu Sufyan al-Azdi Saed al-Shahri, formerly prisoner number 372 in Guantanamo, said that they will continue the struggle started by their martyred jihadis until the establishment of an Islamic caliphate. He pledged allegiance to Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri assuring them that imprisonment only strengthened his resolve to maintain his jihad against traitors and apostates:

We say to our dear nation, clarifying the truth behind what was said by these treacherous rulers [the Saudis] on the issue of Cuba, where they collaborated with the Americans by sending investigators to Cuba to interrogate us, extract confessions from us, and make accusations against us, which intensified our torture. By God, we assert to our leaders and shaykhs - Shaykh Osama bin Laden, God preserve him, and Dr Ayman Zawahiri - that we will fulfill our promise, and that we will perform the jihad. By God our detention only made us more insistent and committed to our principles, which we strove for and were detained for (Faloja1.net, January 25).

Al-Shahri called upon the jihadi nation to deploy for jihad against Jews and Arab leaders who have imposed blockades on Palestine. Further, al-Shahri promised to come to the rescue of the imprisoned jihadis in Saudi Arabia: “I swear to God, we will not disappoint you or any of our brothers anywhere. Your letters reached us and we are aware of the torture you’re enduring in the Saudi prisons.” Al-Shahri alleged that over 18,000 jihadis are imprisoned in Saudi Arabia.

In the second statement, al-Qaeda’s amir in the Arabian Peninsula, the Yemeni Abu Basir Nasser al-Wahayshi, welcomed the opportunity to reunite with Saudi ex-Afghan jihadi comrades in Yemen to resume endeavors to set up an Islamic caliphate: “We are uniting our efforts to cleanse the Arabian Peninsula from the occupiers’ profanity and their treacherous agents, and then march towards our brothers in Gaza and Palestine... Rejoice people of Bait al-Maqdis [Jerusalem], the people of the victorious confession are coming...” Al-Wahayshi ends his statement with an ultimatum to the Arab rulers to assist jihadis in infiltrating and attacking Israel because Arab countries bordering Israel currently keep tight control over the borders to prevent such infiltration. If routes to Israel are not opened by the Arab states, al-Wahayshi promises jihadis will topple their regimes.

In the third statement, the military leader of AQAP, Shaykh Abu Hureira Qasm al-Rimi (a.k.a. Abu Hureira al-Sana’ani), directly addressed the war in Gaza by promising to come to the rescue of Gazans and accusing Arab regimes in Amman, Cairo, and Damascus of collaboration with the enemy by imposing a blockade on the Gaza strip. Al-Rimi ended his statement with a provocative message directed to Hassan Nasrallah, Secretary General of Hezbollah in Lebanon:

Answer me, why feign crying over Gaza? Didn’t you proclaim that you have 20,000 rockets capable of reaching Tel Aviv? Don’t our brothers in Gaza deserve that you launch one, two or three thousand of these rockets in support of Gazans instead of weeping and reproaching others? Or maybe Lebanese blood is more expensive than the Palestinian Muslim blood? By God, tell me what is the difference between you and [Egyptian President] Hosni Mubarak? Hosni is the Jews’ safety valve in Egypt and you are the safety valve in Lebanon.

The last statement by a field commander of AQAP, Shaykh Abu al-Harith Muhammad al-Oufi, formerly prisoner number 333 in Guantanamo, threatened the Saudi King with terrorist attacks for collaborating with the United States. In his latest message, al-Oufi warned fellow al-Qaeda members in Saudi jails not to trust the Saudi regime’s Care and Reconciliation program, an effort started by Saudi authorities to rehabilitate imprisoned terrorists (see *Terrorism Monitor*, January 25, 2008).

Al-Oufi also threatened to attack the Western presence in Saudi Arabia, urging Saudi security forces guarding foreign embassies and secret churches to repent.

In another interview with the jihadi electronic magazine *Sada al- Malahim* entitled “We Support Gaza by Amputating the Cross’s Aid in the Arab Peninsula,” AQAP Amir Abu Basir al-Wahayshi announced the formation of the Islamic Emirate of Yemen, based on mujahideen from Saudi Arabia who pledged allegiance to him as Amir and al-Shahri as his deputy. On the war in Gaza, al-Wahayshi said the group had opened up camps to train and send mujahideen to liberate Palestine. “The plan is to cut off Saudi oil support for the crusaders’ campaign. Yemen will aid all Muslims anywhere” (hanein.org, January 20).

As a consequence of the war on terrorism, al-Qaeda was forced to decentralize its formations and cells. The Yemeni-Saudi al-Qaeda alliance described by al-Wahayshi and others could be considered a partial return to a centralized strategy. Elements of Yemen’s impoverished and tribal-based society might benefit financially from offering Saudi Arabia’s al-Qaeda safe haven as well as procuring arms and minding al-Qaeda’s weapons caches. Yemen’s mujahideen could also benefit from the operational expertise of Saudi Arabia’s al-Qaeda group, similar to the operational assistance offered to tribal militants in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

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### **Pakistan’s Lashkar- e-Taiba Chooses Between Kashmir and the Global Jihad**

In a surprising shift of tactics, the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorist organization has toned down its violent Kashmir-centric agenda, claiming it will pursue a peaceful settlement of the Kashmir problem. The radical group, blamed for many terror attacks in India, including November’s assault on Mumbai, also denied pursuing a global jihadist agenda. In a similar vein, another Pakistan-based terrorist group, Hizb ul-Mujahideen (HM), and the terrorist conglomerate known

as the Muttahida Jihad Council (MJC) have offered to end their so-called “armed struggle” in Jammu and Kashmir (*The Hindu* [New Delhi], January 22). According to MJC spokesman and HM operative Ehsan Elahi, “It is [our] desire that the [Kashmir] problem is resolved through dialogue. We want peace but it does not mean that we are renouncing our stance or showing a weakness” (Kashmir Newline, January 23).

Also distancing itself from global jihadi linkages is Jama’at ud-Dawa, an Islamic charity and front organization for Lashkar e-Taiba. The group’s controversial spokesman, Abdullah (Muntazir) Gaznavi, indicated that their struggle is only confined to the Kashmir region: “We have no global agenda... [we] just want the freedom of Kashmir and if it comes peacefully [we] will welcome it. We don’t see armed struggle as the only way to achieve our goal” (*Hindustan Times*, January 19). [1]

More surprisingly, the mysterious Abdullah Muntazir also disowned LeT commanders Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi and Zarar Shah, who masterminded the November attacks in Mumbai (*Times of India*, January 9). Muntazir has been attempting to boost JuD/LeT’s public image for a long time, as well as shielding the JuD chief, Hafiz Mohammed Saeed, from any government action.

Both the LeT and HM are part of the MJC, an umbrella organization of at least 14 terrorist groups operating in the Kashmir region, including al-Badr and Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM). The group is alleged to be financed by Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). The MJC in general and JuD/LeT in particular receive considerable support from Pakistan’s state apparatus, as well as the support of a fraction of Pakistan’s civil society, centered mostly in Punjab province and around Muzaffarabad in Pakistan Administered Kashmir (PAK). [2] The evident change in tone and tenor of these two violent terrorist groups may be seen as a desperate ploy to avoid the wrath of the international community after the Mumbai attacks of November 26-29.

After a government crackdown and international condemnation, the surprisingly defiant JuD had planned to reorganize itself shortly after its proscription by the UN Security Council under another the umbrella of another militant conglomerate, the Tehrik-e-Hurmat-e-Rasool (THR) (*Dawn* [Karachi], January 3). THR, loosely

translated as the “Movement for Defending the Honor of the Prophet,” is reportedly comprised of several religious and political groups in Pakistan. However, a few weeks later the JuD again reincarnated itself as the Tehrik-e-Tahafuz Qibla Awal (TTQA) (*Times of India*, January 12).

The newly formed TTQA organized a rally in Peshawar rejecting the UN Security Council resolution against Jama’t-ud Dawa, arguing that the Security Council was biased against Muslims, based on its failure to impose a ceasefire in Gaza. The protesters held placards and banners inscribed with various slogans condemning Israel for its barbarism and aggression against Muslim Palestinians and calling for jihad against the United States for its silence on the killing of the people of Gaza (*Pakistan Observer*, January 15).

After days of posturing and stage-managed crackdowns in the wake of the Mumbai attacks, the Islamabad administration finally initiated action against JuD/LeT in mid-January, closing down at least five of their relief camps, nearly twenty offices, and proscribing as many as seven publications, including *Mujalatu Dawa*, *Zarb-i-Taiba*, *Voice of Islam*, and *Nanhay Mujahid*.<sup>[3]</sup> Speaking about the crackdown, Rehman Malik, the advisor to Pakistan’s Prime Minister on Interior Affairs, announced the detention of 124 JuD/LeT members and leaders, including Hafiz Mohammed Saeed, the LeT “operations commander” and the main accused in the Mumbai attacks (*Pak Tribune*, January 15).

Clearly delineating LeT’s ties to the Mumbai carnage, India has provided incriminating evidence to Pakistan. With the mounting international pressure on Pakistan and subsequent crackdown on terrorist hideouts within the country following the UN Security Council ban on the JuD, leaders of these groups have apparently decided to remain dormant with peace flags in hand for the time being, while preparing to come back later to continue their terror activities in the region.

This volte-face of JuD/LeT and MJC is an interesting strategic departure from the terrorist groups’ traditional position. The Mumbai attack brought the LeT’s global jihadist agenda into the limelight, along the lines of al-Qaeda. However, under tremendous international pressure, their sponsors in the Pakistani security

establishment are believed to have directed them to restore the Kashmir agenda and return to the decades-old proxy war in the region.

Recent remarks by British Foreign Secretary David Milband calling for the removal of the LeT’s *raison d’être* by reaching a diplomatic solution to the Kashmir conflict raised a stir on both sides of the Indo-Pakistani border. Milband suggested that “solving the Kashmir issue would deny LeT its ‘call to arms’ and free Pakistan to fight al-Qaeda and Taliban militants in its tribal areas” (*Telegraph*, January 18).

Abdullah Gaznavi responded by describing Milband’s statement as “positive,” saying that the LeT would abandon violence if it could achieve “freedom” for Kashmir by political means: “If the world listens to our cries, and plays its role in resolving the Kashmir issue, there is no point continuing the fight” (*Hindustan Times*, January 19; Indo-Asian News Service, January 19).

Milband’s statement and similar remarks from other Western leaders may have had the inadvertent effect of raising the flagging morale of the LeT and other Kashmir militants by giving the group and its struggle a degree of international legitimacy. In the wake of global indignation over the excessive violence displayed in the Mumbai attack, the LeT is showing signs it is ready to abandon its participation in global jihad and act in tandem with Pakistan’s proxy war policy by refocusing on Kashmir.

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Notes:

1. For a report on how the real identity of Abdullah Muntazir was unearthed by recent FBI investigations in Pakistan and how he managed to act as both JuD and LeT spokesman under different names, see Amir Mir, “Jam’atul Daawa spokesman impersonates as Lashkar-e-Toiba spokesman,” Middle-East Transparent, January 4, [http://www.mettransparent.com/spip.php?page=imprimer\\_article\\_avec\\_forum&id\\_article=5134](http://www.mettransparent.com/spip.php?page=imprimer_article_avec_forum&id_article=5134).

2. See “Pro-JuD protests in Pakistan,” *Greater Kashmir*,

January 26. On the support of the Pakistani State (especially the ISI and military) to Kashmir-centric groups, see, "ISI plan to restructure UJC," *The Tribune*, February 1, 2003; Marianne Heiberg, Brendan O'Leary and John Tirman, *Terror, Insurgency, and the State: Ending Protracted Conflicts*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007, pp. 234-235; Owen Bennett Jones, *Pakistan: Eye of the Storm*, Yale University Press, 2003, p.83.

3. Weeks after the Mumbai attacks, Islamabad sealed around 34 offices of the JuD across Punjab in mid-December, 2008. However, media reports later described the crackdown as ineffective. See former Pakistan minister Ansar Burney's comment on the reported crackdown; "Terrorist camps exist in Pakistan," *Daily Times* (Lahore), December 12, 2008.

### **Afghanistan Deployment puts Germany in al-Qaeda's Crosshairs**

Speaking in accented but fluent German, Abu Talha al-Alamani made al-Qaeda's most direct threat to the German nation yet in a recent video, saying that Germans were "naive and gullible" if they thought they could "emerge unscathed" from being the third-largest troop provider in the NATO alliance in Afghanistan (al-Faloja.info, January 19). The video, released by al-Qaeda's al-Sahab media wing and entitled "Das Rettungspaket fuer Deutschland" (The Rescue Package for Germany), first emerged on jihadi websites on January 17 (though it is dated October 2008). The video showed a turbaned individual identified as Abu Talha al-Alamani (Abu Talha the German) brandishing weapons in a rocky environment, before switching to a direct picture of him preaching to the camera. In the half-hour video, Abu Talha declares that it has been his "wish to blow myself up for Allah since 1993," and provides a nuanced overview of the German political environment highlighting the nation's involvement in Afghanistan. [1] Germany currently provides over 3,300 troops to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan and has agreed to increase the size of its deployment to 4,500 troops.

The speaker in the video was identified by Germany's Interior Ministry as Bekkay Harrach, a 31-year-old Moroccan-born German citizen from Bonn who is a long-term jihadi. Injured by Israel Defense Forces in the West Bank in 2003, Harrach has been in a training camp in the

Afghanistan-Pakistan border region since 2007 and was already on the radar of the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND, the German external security service) (*Der Spiegel*, January 24; *Bild*, January 19). German authorities have verified that they believe the recording is authentic and stated that Harrach is believed to be in contact with the higher echelons of al-Qaeda, with further contacts to militants in Frankfurt, Brunswick, and Ulm (Munich Focus Online, January 22). There are reports that Abu Talha is part of the cross-border Haqqani Network, living in Waziristan under the personal protection of Siraj Haqqani, noted for his extensive use of suicide tactics (*Spiegel Online* [Hamburg], January 25). As Interior Ministry State Secretary August Hanning put it, Harrach is a "very serious Islamist" and the direct targeting of Germany in this way "is a cause for concern" (AFP, January 20, 2009).

The video release came as a suicide car bomber struck near the German Embassy in Kabul, killing four civilians and an American soldier. In a subsequent claim of responsibility, the Taliban declared that the mission was carried out by a local named Shum-ul-Rahman and claimed that the attacker was targeting vehicles carrying German forces near the Embassy (*Dawn* [Karachi], January 17; *Daily Times* [Lahore], January 17, *The Times*, January 18). An unspecified number of suspects in the Embassy attack were seized in overnight raids on January 23 by Afghan troops supported by ISAF forces (AFP, January 23).

In propaganda terms, Germany has long been a rhetorical and ideological target for other groups based in the Pakistani border regions. The Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), an off-shoot of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), has been operating out of Waziristan with direct tentacles into Germany. [2] The group releases videos with German, Russian, Uzbek, Turkish, and Arabic translations and has claimed responsibility for a group of plotters called the "Sauerland Group," who were arrested in Germany in September 2007 while planning a bombing campaign timed to coincide with a Bundestag (German Parliament) vote on whether to extend the German military's mandate in Afghanistan (*Der Spiegel*, September 4, 2008; and see *Terrorism Monitor*, November 8, 2007). A few months later, the group also claimed responsibility for sending young Turkish-German Cüneyt Ciftci to carry out a suicide bombing that killed two U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan (*Der Spiegel*, March 15, 2008). Another German convert active with the group, Eric Breining (who was a roommate

to one of the Sauerland plotters), has released videos taunting the German intelligence services who claimed that he was on his way back to Germany to carry out an attack (*Bild*, September 26, 2008). Breininger (a.k.a. Abdul Ghafar al-Alamani) remains at large.

More recently, in the week before Harrach's video surfaced, the IJU released another video which showed forces fighting in Afghanistan, including an attack on a helicopter. In the same week, a further video was issued by the IMU in German, in which four individuals who appeared to be Arab and spoke good German called upon their German brethren to come and join the fight in Afghanistan. Since the release of Harrach's video, al-Sahab has re-released a previous video showing the June 2008 attack on the Danish Embassy in Islamabad with German subtitles. A recent statement from the German Ministry of the Interior warned, "Attacks in Afghanistan are increasingly targeting Germans. Germany is being named more and more in warnings published on the Internet. The latest threat explicitly warns Germany only" (AFP, January 18).

This rhetorical escalation comes as more details emerge of the threat to Germany from al-Qaeda and affiliated groups in the Afghan-Pakistan region. The IJU's increased use of German in videos, the presence of German nationals (both converts and second generation immigrants of Turkish or Arab descent), and clear evidence that a network appears to exist to send individuals back and forth from Germany to "jihad lands." The connective tissue between these young Germans and al-Qaeda's core has been provided by individuals like 45-year-old Pakistani-German Aleem Nasir, who is currently on trial in Germany on charges of supporting terrorism. Nasir was picked up by Pakistani intelligence services while seeking to board a plane back home from Lahore on June 18, 2008, and claims he was beaten in Pakistani custody (*Pak Tribune*, August 31, 2007; IHT, September 23, 2007). Nasir has also been identified as Bekkay Harrach's contact with al-Qaeda (*Der Spiegel*, January 24).

For German authorities, the specter of the 2004 Madrid bombings hangs in the air. In that instance, al-Qaeda claimed a strategic victory when they ascribed the defeat of the Aznar administration (which had sent Spanish forces into Iraq) by the current Zapatero administration (which subsequently withdrew the forces in line with a campaign promise) to the Madrid bombings. Public

reaction to terrorist attacks can be unpredictable and the known public antipathy in Germany to their forces' deployment in Afghanistan is something that al-Qaeda has likely identified as a possible target. With this new targeting of a German audience by al-Qaeda's media wing, rather than the IJU's, the pressure is clearly being ratcheted up further.

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#### Notes:

1. For a complete open source translation, please see: <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefasahabgerman0109.pdf>.
2. For a detailed analysis of the IJU, please see, Guido Steinberg, "The Islamic Jihad Union," *SWP Comments*, (German Institute for International and Security Affairs - Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik), April 2008: [http://www.swp-berlin.org/en/common/get\\_document.php?asset\\_id=4883](http://www.swp-berlin.org/en/common/get_document.php?asset_id=4883).

### Is Ankara Promoting Zaza Nationalism to Divide the Kurds?

Until recently, speakers of the Zaza language within Turkey have been considered part of the vast Kurdish ethnic group spread over Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. In the 1980s, the creation of a Latin alphabet suitable for Zaza-language publishing created a renewal in Zaza literature and culture, leading to the development of a type of Zaza nationalism that some Kurds suspect is inspired by Turkey's intelligence agencies as a means of dividing the Kurds and weakening the Kurdish militants of the Kurdistan Workers Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan - PKK).

Zaza nationalism is still opposed by some Zaza-speakers who consider themselves Kurds. [1] Zaza nationalism is focused on the Zazaki dialect and native Zazaki speakers in Turkey. Some Zaza nationalists also want an

independent Zaza homeland called Zazaistan in Turkey, potentially weakening the appeal of the PKK among speakers of the Zazaki dialect.

In terms of faith, the Zaza (whose numbers depend on still-contentious ethnic and linguistic definitions but may be placed between one to three million) are roughly divided between Sunni Muslims and Alevis. Usually Zazaki speakers are called Kurds, and Zazaki is considered as a Kurdish language by Kurdish nationalists and many scientists. Zaza nationalists argue that they form their own people on the basis of a lack of mutual comprehensibility between Zaza and the Kurmanci dialect of Kurdish, spoken by nearly 80% of all ethnic Kurds. Some linguists argue that Zaza is not related to the Kurdish language or its dialects. However, ethnic identities are influenced by subjective factors as much as objective factors like genetics and linguistics. Ethnic identities in general are social constructions and can be influenced by state policies.

Zaza nationalism grew primarily in the European Zaza diaspora where the differences between the Kurmanci and Zazaki dialects became more visible due to the freer environment. In Europe, migrants from Turkey were not forced to learn Turkish, but could choose between Kurmanci and Zazaki as a “mother language.” This resulted in Zaza-nationalism in some cases. [2] Another factor was the opposition of some Kurdish nationalists to Zazaki publications. Currently Zaza “nationalism” is still largely a matter of exile politics and seems to be a marginal phenomenon, but it is also starting to influence the debate on ethnic identity in Turkey.

The recent discussion about “mother language education” in Turkey and the policy of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP) government to open a Kurdish-language television station could strengthen the divisions between Kurmanci and Zaza speakers (see *Terrorism Focus*, January 13). The current TRT 6 channel only broadcasts in Kurmanci, but there are also plans to broadcast in the “Kurdish dialects Zaza and Sorani” (*Hurriyet*, January 2). This was welcomed by several Zaza speakers (Bianet.org, January 7). On internet forums, however, Zaza nationalists have already emphasized that they want a Zaza channel, not a Kurdish Kurmanci channel.

Anthropologist Martin van Bruinessen has described the popular conspiracy theory among Kurds that Zaza nationalism is a machination of the Turkish intelligence services. [3] The claims of Kurdish nationalists may not be completely unfounded. In fact, many Turkish nationalists support the notion that Zazas are not Kurds. They think this could hasten the assimilation of Kurds and weaken support for the PKK.

In 1996 the Turkish Democracy Foundation (TDF - a non-governmental organization devoted to “the creation of a stable democracy in Turkey”) published a small booklet condemning the PKK’s brand of Kurdish nationalism. They focused on the “heterogeneous” nature of Kurds and emphasized that some Zazas do not see themselves as Kurdish. The booklet noted that Kurds would rather be part of a democratic Turkey than become “part of a heterogeneous community entangled in intertribal violence and marked with the hegemony of tribal thinking.” [4]

But Turkish interest in the cultural heterogeneity of Kurds is older. The Turkish nationalist Hasan Resit Tankut proposed in 1961 to create a Turkish corridor between Zaza and Kurmanci speakers to accelerate their integration into Turkish culture. Some other Turkish authors have presented the Zaza speakers as a distinct ethnic group, different from the Kurds. [5]

Some Kurds have suggested a link between the Sunni founder of Zaza-nationalism, Ebubekir Pamukcu (d.1993), and the Turkish intelligence services, accusing Pamukcu of helping split the Kurdish nation. The Zaza-nationalistic movement was welcomed and financially supported by certain circles in Turkey’s intelligence establishment and Pamukcu has since been accused of having ties to Turkish intelligence. [6] A Zaza publisher in Ankara is believed by some Kurds to be controlled by the Turkish intelligence services. In an interview with Kurdmedia, Kurdish nationalist and Zazanki linguist Mehmet Malmisanij said the name of this “Zazaistan” publisher was the “Zaza Culture and Publication House” and was part of the Turkish intelligence services with the task of attacking the Kurdish nationalist movement. “The conclusion that I draw... is that these [Zaza nationalist groups] were groups based in the state, or with a more favorable expression, groups that thought in parallel with the state” (KurdishMedia.com, October 6, 2003).



PKK-leader Abdullah Ocalan also claimed that Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (Milli Istihbarat Teskilati – MIT) is behind the growing political and cultural activities of the Zazas in Turkey: “The MIT is behind this. They are doing this to stop the development of Kurdish national consciousness.” [7]

There are also signs a separate Zaza identity is getting more attention in the political sphere. Turkey's Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi - MHP) has never used the Kurdish language in political statements, but MHP member Abdullah Arzakçı made a surprising speech in Kurdish in 2006 in which he said, “I'm Zaza, I'm Kurd. There is no Kurdish problem.” (*Zaman*, 15 May 2006). Arzakçı intended to show that it is no longer a problem in Turkey to call oneself Kurdish or Zaza.

In 2007 the polling company Konda took an important step by making an ethnic differentiation between Zazas and Kurds (*Milliyet*, March 22, 2007). Earlier a Turkish nationalist think-tank reported on “Zaza-Kurds” and there are steadily more Turkish newspapers and online publications that conclude Zazas are not Kurds. An example is the contribution of a Zaza reader to the newspaper *Today's Zaman*. She stressed that there are “millions of Kurds, Zazas and Laz who do not see themselves as different from their Turkish brothers and sisters, and their problems are no different from the problems of this country.” The writer emphasized her loyalty to Turkey (*Today's Zaman*, August 23, 2008).

Even Turkish premier Recep Tayyip Erdogan made a distinction between the Zazas and Kurds when he visited Hakkari in November 2008 (*Zaman*, November 2, 2008). The former mayor of Sur in Diyarbakir province, Abdullah Demirbas (a member of the ethnic-Kurdish Democratic Society Party – DTP), recently denied the existence of any influence from Zaza-nationalism on the population of southeast Turkey, but it is clear Turkish politicians are starting to distinguish between the Zazas and Kurds (Kurmanji-speakers), apparently to weaken Kurdish nationalist claims (Kurdmedia.com, January 20).

Most Zaza nationalists are hostile to the PKK, something that can be useful to Ankara in its fight against Kurdish militancy. Zaza nationalists accuse the PKK of “anti-Zaza” activities and blame both the Turkish military

and the PKK for the depopulation of Zaza regions. [8] Zaza nationalists fear assimilation from both Kurdish nationalists and the Turkish state.

It is likely that the Zaza identity could become another tool in the political battle between Turkey and the Kurdish nationalists. A freer cultural climate in Turkey with more space for education in native tongues like Zazaki and Kurmanji could also eliminate the concept of a “Turkish enemy” among non-Turkish ethnicities. In this case the nationalism of the Kurds could become a bigger threat to Zaza speakers than Turkish nationalism.

The problem is that Turks fear that this will result in the end of the state due to the presence of many ethnicities in Turkey. The Ottoman Empire was divided into ethnic regions (Greek, Armenian, Kurdish, etc) by the Allied Forces after World War I with the 1920 Treaty of Sevres. This has made the Turks afraid of once more losing territory to ethnic nationalists, a condition some call “Sevres paranoia.”

In the end Zaza-nationalism could play a role in the ongoing Turkish-Kurdish debate, but it is not clear whether the Zaza-identity will become popular among Zaza-speakers who still classify themselves as Turks and Kurds. If the Zaza-identity becomes more popular, this could decrease support among the one to three million Zazas for the PKK and weaken Kurdish nationalism.

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#### Notes:

1. Martin van Bruinessen, “Kurdish Nationalism and Competing Ethnic Loyalties”, Original English version of: “Nationalisme kurde et ethnicités intra-kurdes,” *Peuples Méditerranéens* no. 68-69 (1994), pp.11-37.

[http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/Competing\\_Ethnic\\_Loyalties.htm](http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/Competing_Ethnic_Loyalties.htm).

2. Martin van Bruinessen, op cit.

3. Ibid.

4. Turkish Democracy Foundation, Fact Book on Turkey

Kurds and the PKK terrorism, 1996. URL: <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/8572/ii.htm>.

5. Martin van Bruinessen, "Constructions of ethnic identity in the late Ottoman Empire and Republican Turkey: The Kurds and Their Others," March 8, 1997. [http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/constructions\\_of\\_ethnic\\_identity.htm](http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/constructions_of_ethnic_identity.htm).

6. Ibid.

7. Unpublished interview by Paul White with PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, at the Mahsum Korkmaz Akademisi, Lebanon, July 2, 1992.

8. Zulfü Selcan, Grammatik der Zaza-Sprache, *Nord-Dialekt (Dersim-Dialekt)*, Wissenschaft & Technik Verlag, Berlin, 1998, p. 23.