



Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

VOLUME VI, ISSUE 7 ♦ APRIL 3, 2008

IN THIS ISSUE:

UNDER PRESSURE – THE PKK LAUNCHES 2008 CAMPAIGN
By Gareth Jenkins.....1

JORDAN’S JIHAD SCHOLAR AL-MAQDISI IS FREED FROM PRISON
By James Brandon.....3

TRIBES AND REBELS: THE PLAYERS IN THE BALOCHISTAN INSURGENCY
By Muhammad Tahir.....6

TARGETING THE KHYBER PASS: THE TALIBAN’S SPRING OFFENSIVE
By Andrew McGregor.....9



Terrorism Monitor is a publication of The Jamestown Foundation. The Terrorism Monitor is designed to be read by policy-makers and other specialists yet be accessible to the general public. The opinions expressed within are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of The Jamestown Foundation.

Unauthorized reproduction or redistribution of this or any Jamestown publication is strictly prohibited by law.



For comments or questions about our publications, please send an email to pubs@jamestown.org, or contact us at:

1111 16th St. NW, Suite #320
Washington, DC • 20036
Tel: (202) 483-8888
Fax: (202) 483-8337
Copyright ©2008

Under Pressure – The PKK Launches 2008 Campaign

By Gareth Jenkins

On April 2, the Turkish General Staff (TGS) issued a statement claiming to have killed 16 militants of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) for the loss of three Turkish soldiers during two days of fierce fighting in the province of Sirnak on Turkey’s border with Iraq, suggesting that the PKK’s 2008 campaign is now underway (tsk.mil.tr, April 2). PKK activity has traditionally increased in late March and early April as the spring thaw begins to melt the snow in the mountain passes in the organization’s main battleground in southeastern Turkey and along the infiltration routes into Turkey from its bases in northern Iraq, where most of the armed wing’s 4,000 members wait out the winter. However, Turkish air and ground operations against PKK positions in northern Iraq in December to February have radically changed the political and military environment and look set to ensure that the 2008 campaigning season will be fought under very different conditions to those of recent years.

The Turkish operations in northern Iraq during the winter were the direct result of a change in the PKK’s strategy in fall 2007, when it abruptly launched a series of mass attacks against the Turkish army. The PKK leadership will have been aware that a similar strategy in the early 1990s failed because the Turkish army’s superior firepower—particularly its ability to deploy F-16 fighters and Cobra helicopters—enabled it to inflict an unsustainably high level of casualties as PKK units attempted to withdraw. The PKK leadership appears, however, to have calculated that even if its own forces suffered heavy losses, they would be able to kill enough soldiers to increase the public pressure on the Turkish government

to strike at the organization's camps in northern Iraq. The assumption was that this would be prevented by the United States—thus handing the PKK a major propaganda victory. To their surprise, Washington bowed to Turkish pressure in November 2007 and not only allowed Turkish F-16s to bomb PKK positions in northern Iraq but also began to provide Ankara with intelligence on the organization's movements in the country. On February 21, three battalions of Turkish commandos launched an attack on PKK forward bases in the Zap region of northern Iraq, which has long been one of the organization's main staging areas for infiltrations into Turkey. By the time the commandos withdrew on February 29, the TGS claimed that they had killed 240 PKK militants for the loss of 27 members of the Turkish security forces (see *Terrorism Monitor*, March 24).

Since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the PKK has often implied that it was in contact with U.S. officials and even had tacit U.S. support, something which was also believed by many Turkish nationalists. Washington's decision to allow Turkey to launch cross-border operations exposed this claim as a fiction. In the weeks following the first Turkish air raid in December 2007, the references to the United States in the PKK's propaganda and internal literature became increasingly vitriolic. Perhaps more importantly, the Turkish cross-border operations also intensified the pressure on the Iraqi Kurds to clamp down on the PKK and at least move to confine the organization to its camps in the mountains even if they could not move against it militarily. As a result, in addition to demolishing the PKK's belief that its bases in northern Iraq were immune to military attack, the Turkish cross-border operations also forced the organization onto the defensive psychologically by demonstrating its international isolation.

A Shift in Leadership?

In the past, major strategic decisions—such as the one to resume the armed struggle in June 2004 after a five-year lull—were taken by the PKK's founder Abdullah Ocalan, who has been serving a life sentence on the Turkish prison island of Imrali since 1999. Ocalan would communicate his decisions during meetings with his lawyers in jail. They would then be couriered to the PKK leadership in the mountains of northern Iraq, which would be responsible for formulating the details of how they were to be implemented.

All of Ocalan's meetings with his lawyers are monitored by the Turkish security forces. However, the decision to start staging mass attacks in fall 2007 appears to have caught the Turks unprepared, suggesting that it was taken not on Imrali but in the mountains of northern Iraq. The decision-making processes within the PKK leadership are opaque. PKK propaganda maintains that decisions are taken by the organization's leadership after harmonious consultation with its members. Turkish propaganda insists that PKK decisions are taken by a coterie of powerful individuals who are locked in a permanent power struggle. Reports of internal divisions in the PKK, conspiracies and attempted assassinations of rival factions are a staple of the Turkish media. Some of the stories are probably true. Others are undoubtedly disinformation planted by Turkish intelligence.

The PKK currently appears to be dominated by three individuals, all of them long-term veterans of the organization—Murat Karayilan, who is chairman of the PKK Executive Committee; Cemil Bayik, who was one of the founders of the organization in 1978; and Fehman Huseyin, the commander of the HPG (Hezen Parastina Gel, or the People's Defense Force). Both Karayilan and Bayik were born in Turkey and are based in the PKK's main camps in the Qandil Mountains of northern Iraq, around 60 miles (100 kilometers) from the Turkish border. In recent years, they appear to have been working closely together. Huseyin, who also uses the *nom de guerre* of Dr. Bahoz, was born in Syria and is believed to spend a large proportion of his time in the organization's forward bases close to the Turkish border, such as those in the Zap region.

When the Turkish commandos withdrew from northern Iraq on February 29, Karayilan described their departure as a victory for the PKK. At a ceremony to induct 100 new recruits into the HPG on March 8, a commander with the *nom de guerre* of Kocer Urfa delivered a speech lauding what he described as the "Zap victory," predicting that it would inspire many more Kurds to join the organization. It is possible that, if it is repeated enough by the PKK's propaganda outlets, such creativity will be believed by some of the organization's rank and file. However, it is difficult to imagine that the PKK leadership is unaware that the cross-border operation of February 21-29 was not only a military defeat for the PKK but demonstrated how badly the organization had miscalculated when it decided on a change of strategy in fall 2007.

Arrests and Protests

On March 14, the Turkish NTV television channel reported that PKK member Nedim Sevim had been detained on an Interpol Red Notice after apparently trying to pass through Rome's Fiumicino Airport with a forged passport. Sevim is alleged to be one of the leading figures in the PKK's fundraising operations in Europe (NTV, March 14). Within days of his detention, stories began circulating in the Turkish media quoting unidentified "terrorism experts" as claiming that a faction of the PKK close to Karayilan had betrayed Seven to the Italian police as part of a power struggle between Karayilan and Huseyin. According to the reports, Seven is close to Huseyin and had recently replaced an associate of Karayilan's as head of PKK operations in Europe (Anadolu Agency, March 19; *Today's Zaman*, March 20). Such reports are probably part of a disinformation campaign by Turkish intelligence. Nevertheless, over the months ahead the internal cohesion of the PKK is likely to come under considerable strain until it can achieve a demonstrable success in order to compensate for the setbacks it suffered this past winter. However, it is unclear how such a success can be achieved.

In recent weeks, there have been several arrests in Turkish cities of alleged PKK militants with A4 and C4 explosives, suggesting that the organization is planning to continue the urban bombing campaign that it launched in August 2004 using mostly small improvised explosive devices (IEDs) (Anadolu Agency, March 15, 24; *Hurriyet*, March 15; *Vatan*, March 31). In late 2007 and early 2008, the Turkish security forces seized large quantities of ammonium nitrate, which was allegedly procured by the PKK in preparation for mass-casualty attacks using a vehicle-delivered IED. Previous PKK attempts to use large, vehicle-delivered IEDs have been counterproductive. Most recently, on January 4, a car bombing in Diyarbakir targeting a bus carrying military personnel ended up killing six civilians, five of them teenage students (see *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, January 10). It is unclear whether the PKK is prepared to risk eroding its public support by staging a similar bombing. Nor has it demonstrated that it has the ability to carry out a more sophisticated attack, such as the assassination of a high-ranking government official.

There is no doubt that PKK supporters were heavily involved in the clashes between demonstrators and police during celebrations to mark the Kurdish New Year of Newroz (see *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, March 25). On April 1, another of the demonstrators died

from his injuries, raising the death toll to three, with several hundred more injured (*Radikal*, April 2). The PKK's propaganda outlets have made extensive use of footage and photographs of members of the security forces attacking Newroz demonstrators. It is unclear whether the PKK will attempt to stage more violent demonstrations or, more dangerously, seek to incite ethnic tensions between Turks and Kurds.

Conclusion

As the snow continues to melt, the PKK can be expected to mount operations against Turkish military targets in the mountains of southeastern Turkey. Although it remains capable of inflicting casualties, the organization does not appear to be strong enough to achieve either a major victory or a sustained string of minor successes. Most critically, it can no longer feel safe in northern Iraq and faces the prospect not only of casualties from Turkish cross-border raids and air strikes but also of severe disruption to its supply lines and logistical infrastructure.

Even if the PKK has tried to reinvent the Turkish cross-border raid into the Zap region as a victory, it was nevertheless a battle that the organization never expected to have to fight. Indeed, far from securing a major propaganda victory, the PKK's ill-chosen change of strategy in 2007 means that it is likely to spend most of the 2008 campaigning season on the defensive. Under such circumstances, maintaining its internal unity and simply surviving may be the best that it can hope for.

Gareth Jenkins is a writer and journalist resident in Istanbul, where he has been based for the last 20 years.

Jordan's Jihad Scholar al-Maqdisi is Freed from Prison

By James Brandon

On March 12, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi—born Isam Muhammad Tahir al-Barqawi in 1959—was released from a Jordanian prison after almost three years imprisonment without trial (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 13). Maqdisi has long played a pivotal role in defining jihadist ideology. After taking part in the Afghan jihad of the 1980s, he refined the ideology of declaring *takfir* against other Muslims—i.e. defining them as apostates and thus deserving of death—leading to the creation

of jihadist groups in Jordan and 1995 attacks in Saudi Arabia—whose government he had denounced as un-Islamic as early as 1989. Between 1995 and 1999, Maqdisi was imprisoned in Jordan, during which time he expanded his ideas and built new radical networks with the help of his right-hand man, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. From 1999, Maqdisi has spent most of his time in Jordanian prisons, reemerging briefly in 2005 before being re-imprisoned for giving an interview to al-Jazeera television in which he criticized Zarqawi's attacks on civilians while reiterating his support for a broader jihad against the West and "un-Islamic" governments. Despite his long prison terms, however, Maqdisi has written and distributed several accessible books addressing key issues such as democracy, *takfir* and jihadist tactics, giving him an almost unmatched influence over the evolution of jihadist theory.

Maqdisi's Influence

Maqdisi's latest release from prison—apparently on grounds of ill-health—was reported extensively on radical Islamic websites. Significantly, even Islamic extremists outside the Arab world reacted euphorically to the news of his release. For example, a senior member of the *islamicawakening.com* forum, a prominent English-language Salafi website, responded to news of his release by writing: "AllahuAkbar! AllahuAkbar! Nothing describes the happiness of the *mu'mineen* [faithful] all around the world this day. AllahuAkbar! Our beloved Shaykh is released!" Similarly, on *islambase.co.uk*, the online home of many British extremists, one member described his release as "the best news in ages." Their attitude suggests that despite the death of Zarqawi and his own long imprisonment, Maqdisi's teachings—a mixture of bigotry and pragmatism—are still seen as relevant. Indeed, Maqdisi's correct predictions in 2004 and 2005 that Zarqawi's attacks on Muslim civilians would undermine support for al-Qaeda both in Iraq and abroad may have further boosted his standing among Islamic extremists worldwide. In light of Maqdisi's influence and popularity it is worth examining his key ideas in detail.

Maqdisi on *Takfir*

Like many jihadis, Maqdisi's ideology depends on declaring *takfir* against his Muslim rivals in order to permit violence against them. However, he repeatedly says that declaring *takfir* should not be undertaken lightly; in his 1997 book *This Is Our Aqeedah* (creed), he frequently quotes Qadi Iyad, a 12th century judge

from Grenada, as saying: "Declaring the blood of those who pray, who are upon *tawhid* [belief in the unity of God], to be permissible is a serious danger" [1]. Maqdisi adds that *takfir* should only be pronounced against those who have abandoned *tawhid*. He says a Muslim abandons *tawhid*, and hence Islam, if their actions show allegiance to un-Islamic entities by aiding them or participating in their legislation. In other words, he says only those who actively support non-Islamic governments or oppose jihadis should be targeted. Unlike many al-Qaeda members, Maqdisi repeatedly warns on both moral and strategic grounds against pronouncing *takfir*—and hence carrying out attacks—against ordinary Muslims, saying that in the absence of an Islamic state, it is understandable that many Muslims are unable to perfectly practice Islam. In his July 2004 book, *An Appraisal of the Fruits of Jihad (Waqafat me'a themerat al-jihad)*, he writes contemptuously of jihadis who "start bombing cinemas or make plans to blow up recreation grounds, sports clubs and other such places frequented by sinful Muslims." Similarly, in *This is Our Aqeedah*, he criticizes extremists who kill for small infractions of Islamic principles: "The shaving of the beard and imitation of the *kuffar* (infidel) and other forms of disobedience like it is a general affliction that is spread far and wide. It is not suitable by itself for evidence of *takfir*."

On Democracy

A large proportion of Maqdisi's writings are devoted to the discussion of democracy, which he regards as one of the main threats to Islam. Maqdisi does not object to democracy as a form of representative government, however, but because legislators deliberately create man-made laws to replace or supplement the *sharia* (Islamic law). Maqdisi's arguments stem from his belief that a Muslim's faith is not complete unless he lives under *sharia* law. As he wrote in his early 1990s book, *Democracy is a Religion (Al-Deemoqratiyya Deen)*: "Obedience in legislation is also an act of worship" [2]. Maqdisi consequently argued that anyone seeking to create legislation to replace the *sharia* is effectively seeking to take the place of God. From this, he concludes that "anyone who seeks to implement legislation created by someone other than Allah, is in fact a polytheist." Yet his dislike for democracy is not absolute; he accepts that consultation (*shura*) between a Muslim ruler and his subjects is a valid Islamic principle—but says that this principle has been hijacked by secularists to legitimize the legislative aspect of democracies. Unlike many al-Qaeda fighters, however, Maqdisi says that the

illegitimacy of legislative elections does not necessarily permit attacks against anyone who votes, since some people vote only “to choose representatives for worldly living” rather than to subvert the *sharia* [3].

On Jihadi Tactics

Maqdisi believes that violent jihad against non-Muslims is a core part of Islam which can be carried out by individuals at any time or place. In an interview with *al-Nida* magazine in 1999, he described jihad as an “act of worship that is permissible any time” [4]. He also says that jihad is not dependent on living in an Islamist state or having a Caliph, nor is it restricted to battlefields or places of open conflict. Despite this, however, Maqdisi criticizes would-be jihadis whose enthusiasm for glory blinds them to political and religious realities. In *An Appraisal of the Fruits of Jihad*, he mocks the “youths moved by their zeal.” He continues:

[They] have studied neither the *sharia* nor reality. They have newly begun practicing the religion and have not yet rid themselves of the arrogance, pride, and tribalism of their pre-Islamic days, such that some of them even consider it shameful, cowardly, and disgraceful to be secret and discrete. Others proclaim that they are carrying automatic weapons or bombs that they roam about with in their cars here and there, showing them to this person and that person; they think it is a trivial matter to blab to everyone about how they dream and hope to kill Americans and destroy the American military bases in their lands. They then become astonished at how the enemies of Allah ask him about these things when they interrogate him, and he wonders how they knew about it?! [5]

Maqdisi also complains that many jihadist attacks are not carried out for strategic benefit but because such attacks are easy:

There are other young enthusiasts who oppose us by attacking churches or killing elderly tourists, or relief agency delegates—and other such trivial targets—whereby they do not consider what will benefit the *da’wah* [call to religion], jihad or Islam, nor do they give preference to what will cause most injury to the enemies of Allah. Rather, their choice is only based on the easiest target.” Maqdisi describes the best mujahideen as those who are “looking for targets that will bring

down the enemy combatants and defy them—such as nuclear weapons, or intelligence centers and political posts, or centers of legislation and economy in the land of the polytheists [6].

Maqdisi also criticizes those who attack Shiite Muslims, objecting to the attacks on both theological and practical grounds. In a 2005 interview with al-Jazeera, he said that ordinary Shiites could not be held responsible for their beliefs: “The laypeople of the Shiite are like the laypeople of the Sunna, I don’t say 100 percent, but some of these laypeople only know how to pray and fast and do not know the details of the [Shiite] sect” [7]. This pragmatism does not contradict his intellectual hatred for Shiite teachings, saying in *This Is Our Aqeedah*: “We declare our hostility toward the path of the *Rawafid* [the Shiites] who hate the companions of the prophet and curse them.”

On the West

Maqdisi frequently writes that hating non-Muslims is an Islamic duty. In his 1984 book, *The Religion of Abraham (Millat Ibrahim)*, he says that this hatred “should be shown openly and declared from the outset.” In *An Appraisal of the Fruits of Jihad*, he writes that any attacks on non-Muslims are theologically justified regardless of whether they result in any progress toward creating, or “consolidating,” an Islamic state and regardless of changing political circumstances: “Any fighting done for the sake of inflicting injury upon the enemies of Allah is a righteous, legislated act, even if it brings about nothing more than inflicting this injury, angering the enemy [and] causing them harm.” Simultaneously, however, he argues that for strategic reasons the mujahideen should at present concentrate their efforts on trying to establish a pure Islamic state in the Muslim world, saying that “one of the greatest tragedies of the Muslims today is that they do not have an Islamic state that establishes their religion on the earth.” He also says that “the mammoth, accurately planned operations that were carried out in Washington and New York, despite their size, they do not amount to more than fighting for injury”—i.e. that they were justified only because they killed non-Muslims but had no strategic benefit. Importantly, however, he also says that if such attacks make it harder for the mujahideen to consolidate and build a true Islamic state, they should be avoided.

Outlook

Through his writings which simultaneously justify both extreme violence and tactical pragmatism, Maqdisi has gained an iconic status in radical circles at a time when many jihadis—perhaps including even Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri—are becoming increasingly discredited. As a result, a public retraction of his more extreme views would send shockwaves through the jihadist community; on the other hand, a systematic recalibration of jihadist theory focusing attacks on Western military installations and secularists in the Arab world could reinvigorate the jihadi movement and perhaps win it new followers. Given that Jordan has reportedly forbidden Maqdisi from speaking publicly as part of the conditions of his release, it seems unlikely that his views have changed while in prison (*Dar al-Hayat*, March 13). A poem allegedly written by Maqdisi in May 2007 tellingly describes a conversation between himself and the prison authorities in which they tell him: “Renounce [your views]; many shaykhs have... Renounce and you will be generously rewarded with material [benefits]. In return, you shall [have freedom to] speak” [8]. Maqdisi records his response as “Prison is sweeter to me ... My suffering for the sake of religion is sweet.” If Maqdisi has indeed remained loyal to his ideals, much will depend on how much freedom Jordan’s government gives him to propagate his ideas; Maqdisi has consistently shown himself willing to continue promoting jihadist ideology regardless of the personal consequences.

James Brandon is a senior research fellow at the Centre for Social Cohesion in London. He is a former journalist who has reported on Islamic issues in Europe, the Middle East and Africa for a wide variety of print and broadcast media. He holds an MA in Middle Eastern Studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London.

Notes

1. See the English translation of *This Is Our Aqeedah* (Al-Tibyan Publications) at <http://ia341232.us.archive.org/2/items/sep2007tib/This-is-our-aqeedah.pdf>.
2. Taken from Abu Muhammad al-Maleki’s English translation of *Democracy is a Religion* which is available on the islambase.co.uk website.
3. *This Is Our Aqeedah*.
4. An edited transcript of the interview is included in the introduction to *This Is Our Aqeedah*.

5. From *An Appraisal of the Fruits of Jihad*. An English translation of the book is serialized on the pro-jihadi website tibyan.wordpress.com.

6. *An Appraisal of the Fruits of Jihad*. From the chapter “Let the expert sharpen the bow.”

7. Cited in Nibras Kazimi, “A Virulent Ideology In Mutation: Zaraqawi Upstages Maqdisi” in *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* Vol. 2 (Hudson Institute, 2005) p. 67.

8. Middle East Media Research Institute, *Islamist Websites Monitor* No. 105, “A Poem by Al-Maqdisi on the Occasion of His Father’s Death,” May 31, 2007.

Tribes and Rebels: The Players in the Balochistan Insurgency

By Muhammad Tahir

As the violence on Pakistan’s northwest frontier dominates the headlines, a lesser-known insurgency has gripped Pakistan’s southwestern province of Balochistan. Bomb blasts and rocket attacks have become almost daily events in this region: A ten-week period in 2008 saw 76 insurgent-linked incidents reported, claiming the lives of 14 people and wounding 123 (South Asia Terrorism Portal: Balochistan Timeline 2008).

The troubled history of Balochistan dates back to the independence of Pakistan in 1947, beginning as a reaction to the annexation of the princely state of Qalat—later joined to three other states to form modern Balochistan—by Pakistani authorities in 1948. The annexation led to the first Baloch rebellion, which was swiftly put down. The security situation in the region remained fragile as rebellions erupted in 1958, 1973, and most recently in 2005.

Unlike previous anti-government insurrections, it is currently hard to pinpoint one person or group for orchestrating these incidents as there are today several groups in Balochistan potentially interested in challenging the government. The most immediate suspect is the Taliban, who are unhappy with Pakistan’s cooperation with the United States in its war on terror. The Taliban is active throughout Balochistan, particularly in Quetta and the Pashtun belt of the province, bordering with Afghanistan.

However, despite the Islamist presence, the prime motivators of the current insurgency remain Baloch

nationalists, who live in the remote mountains of the province and believe they have been deprived of their rights and revenues from the considerable natural resources of their province. The nationalists believe these revenues are appropriated by the federal government with little return to the province (*Ausaf*, February 7, 2006).

The Baloch claim to have been native to the region since 1200 BC. Today, there are an estimated eight to nine million Baloch, living in Iran and Afghanistan as well as Pakistan. Their language consists of three main dialects: Balochi, Brahwi and Saraiki. The Balochistan province of Pakistan is one of the important Baloch settlements in the region, located at the eastern edge of the Iranian plateau and in the border region between southwest, central and south Asia. It is geographically the largest of the four provinces of Pakistan and composes 48 percent of the nation's total territory.

Though the Baloch have a long history of mistrust of the central government of Pakistan, the federal government has its own interpretation of the current tensions, claiming that the hostile situation is provoked by Baloch nationalist leaders who consider large-scale initiatives to develop the region as a threat to their influence. President Pervez Musharraf even accused the leading tribal chiefs of the Baloch tribes of Bugti, Marri and Mingal of playing a direct role in the mounting insurgency (*Daily Dunya*, August 25, 2006; *Dawn* [Karachi], July 21, 2006).

The Baloch Tribes

- The Bugti tribe is one of approximately 130 Baloch tribes, with approximately 180,000 members dwelling mainly in the mountainous region of Dera Bugti. The tribe is divided into the sub-tribes of Rahija Bugti, Masori Bugti and Kalpar Bugti. For decades this tribe has been dominated by the Rahija Bugti family of Akbar Khan Bugti, a prominent Baloch nationalist. Before he took the chieftainship at 12 years of age in 1939, his father and grandfather were leaders of the tribe.

Unlike some other traditional Baloch tribal families, the Akbar Bugti's family was considered moderate, as Akbar's grandfather, Shahbaz Khan Bugti, was knighted by Britain, and Akbar Bugti himself was educated at Oxford and held several of the most powerful political positions in the

country: governor, chief minister of Balochistan and federal interior minister. Until his death in 2006 in an air and ground assault by Pakistani security forces, Akbar Bugti was also chief of the Jamhuri Watan Party, established in 1990 (*Bakhabar*, August 27, 2006).

The issue of royalties and the ownership of gas fields—discovered in Akbar Bugti's hometown of Dera Bugti and providing 39 percent of the country's total requirement—remained the main cause of conflict between the tribal chief and the government. Pakistani officials claim that Akbar Bugti was paid around \$4 million annually in royalties, but used these resources to blackmail the state and build a state-within-the-state (*Khabrain*, August 6, 2006). Islamabad's response, such as supporting rival Kalpar Bugti—who denounced Akbar Bugti's chieftainship—and deploying troops in Dera Bugti, led Akbar Bugti and his followers to take arms against the government.

Akbar Bugti's son, Nawabzada Talal Akbar Bugti, has rejected Prime Minister Gillani's offer of negotiations conditional on laying down arms, saying that the Baloch people will only do so after they have achieved their rights and gained complete autonomy (ANI, April 3). Another son, Jamil Akbar Bugti, is currently fighting a freeze on his assets on the placement of his name on Pakistan's exit control list (APP, March 28). A grandson, Nawab Sardar Brahamdagh Khan Bugti, is a major leader of Baloch militants.

- The Marri is another major Baloch tribe, based in the Kohlo district of Balochistan. Their chief, Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri, was branded by President Musharraf as the "troublemaker *Sardar*" (tribal chief). The Marri are also divided into sub-tribes: the Gazni Marri, Bejarani Marri and Zarkon Marri, with Khair Bakhsh Marri belonging to the Gazni faction. The total population of the Marri tribe in Balochistan is reportedly around 98,000 and the nature of their relationship with the government is historically hostile—they have integrated little into the political structure of the country.

Unlike the leader of the Bugti tribe, the chieftain of the Marri is said to be closer to the communists, his sons graduating from schools

in Moscow. Unable to withstand the Pakistani military, he and dozens of his followers took refuge in Kabul in 1979, remaining there until Russia withdrew. Khair Bakhsh Marri remains committed to an armed struggle for no less than full independence for Balochistan despite losing dozens of followers and relatives, most recently his son Balach Marri, who reportedly led a rebel group of the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) (*Balochistan Express*, November 22, 2007).

- Ataullah Khan Mingal, leader of the Mingal tribe and another trouble-maker in Musharraf's eyes, has played a dominant role in the political history of Baloch in the region. Unlike the other tribes, the Mingals have given little military resistance, although Ataullah never denounced the anti-government armed resistance.

The party in which he began his political career was the National Awami Party (NAP), led by Pashtun nationalist Wali Khan. Following the elections of May 1972, in which the party swept Balochistan, Atualla Mingal took power as the first chief minister of Balochistan. His role in the NAP-led London Plan—a secret meeting of Pashtun and Baloch nationalists in London, allegedly to prepare ground for declaring the independence of the North-West Frontier Province and Balochistan—is the peak of his nationalistic political career, which led to his imprisonment in 1973. Subsequently the federal government began large-scale military operations in Balochistan to crush the nationalists (BBC Urdu, February 11, 2005).

Following his release from prison in the late 1970s, Atualla Mingal went into exile in London, returning in the mid-1990s to establish the Balochistan National Party (BNP), which brought his son Akhtar Mingal to power as chief minister of Balochistan. Mingal junior was jailed by Musharraf in September 2006 on charges of terrorism, due to his alleged involvement with the recent Baloch insurgency against the Pakistan government.

Tribal Leaders and Insurgent Groups

Since Musharraf came to power in 1999 there have been other goals besides independence that have drawn Baloch nationalists together. The most influential Baloch

leaders—Akbar Khan Bugti, Khair Bakhsh Marri and Ataulla Khan Mingal—have had a variety of reasons to be suspicious of the government's involvement in the area, which they viewed as an attempt to de-seat them from tribal chieftainship. Government moves have included state support to rival factions within the tribe and the deployment of military forces into the region (Bakhabar, August 27, 2006). Nevertheless, no tribal chief is ready to tie himself to insurgent groups publicly, though military sources remain skeptical that the authoritarian tribal chiefs are ignorant of who is firing rockets in their territory.

Currently at least five insurgent groups are publicly known in Balochistan, including the Baloch Republican Army (BRA), Baloch People's Liberation Front (BPLF), Popular Front for Armed Resistance (PFAR), Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), and the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF), the last two being the largest and most widely-known.

Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA)

The BLA's political stance is unequivocal: They stand for the sole goal of establishing an independent state for Baloch in the Balochistan province of Pakistan. The roots of the BLA date back to 1973, during the period of resistance against military operations in Balochistan and the discovery of the secret NAP-led London Plan.

Though the movement did not become public until 2000, some sources claim that the BLA was a Russian creation and came into being during the Afghan war, propped up as a reaction to Pakistan's anti-Soviet involvement in Afghanistan (*Dawn*, July 15, 2006). Those supporting this claim point to the Moscow education of the alleged leader of BLA, Balach Marri, and the time he spent in Russia and Afghanistan.

The number of BLA activists is not known, but Pakistani military sources suggest that there are currently 10,000 Baloch insurgents involved in separatist activities, of which 3,000 are active in the insurgency. The government implicates India and Afghanistan in supporting the movement. President Musharraf reportedly presented a damning file regarding these allegations to President Karzai during his visit to Afghanistan in late February 2006 (*The News* [Islamabad], April 16, 2006). Despite these allegations and regardless of any possible outside support, the nature of the BLA's activities has a local focus, with no foreign nationals being arrested with proven involvement in the Baloch insurgency.

Baloch Liberation Front (BLF)

The BLF, like the other Baloch insurgent groups, recently re-emerged as a potential threat in the region, claiming responsibility for deadly and frequent attacks on government installations. The BLF has so far escaped state accusations of organized terrorism, although its operations seem far bigger than those of other factions. The seventh article of its charter—from the pro-Marri nationalist website sarmachar.org—describes the struggle as a holy duty of all Baloch and asks for moral and financial, if not military, participation. The tenth article says: “The independent state is a matter of life and death for Baloch.” This organization, describing itself as an army of volunteers, also offers a complete program for a post-independence state, ranging from education and health policies to issues of foreign policy and internal and external security.

Some reports suggest that the BLF was established in Damascus in 1964 by Baloch nationalist Juma Khan Marri, who in the 1970s and 1980s was seen actively meeting with the communist regime in Moscow and Kabul. The BLF played an active role in the resistance against military operations in 1973, which continued until the collapse of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s regime. These clashes reportedly took the lives of 3,000 soldiers and around 5,000 Baloch rebels.

It is not clear on what scale the BLF currently operates and who leads it, though Akbar Bugti once described it as an autonomous organization that operated independently of tribal chiefs (Newsline, February 2005).

Conclusion

Regardless of the number of Baloch insurgents, the nature and scale of their activities since 2000 have marked their emergence as a major threat toward regional security, with Pakistan’s new government—elected on February 18—apparently recognizing this threat. Soon after the election, the victorious politicians began signalling the adoption of a softer approach to ease tension in Balochistan. The election was boycotted by the Baloch nationalist parties in response to ongoing military operations in Balochistan that began in 2005.

As a first step to change the tense atmosphere, the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) has hinted at accommodating some Baloch nationalists under its political umbrella and has accepted their demand to stop military operations in the region. The nomination of Aslam Raisani, an

independently elected Baloch member of parliament, for the post of provisional chief minister in Balochistan by the PPP is another signal directed at winning hearts and minds in the province.

It is unclear whether these policies and the appointment of Raisani as a chief minister may bring a major breakthrough, but soon after his nomination, Raisani hinted at taking a completely different approach toward the crisis from the military-based policies of the Musharraf regime. Recently he was quoted by local media saying that the so-called rebel Baloch are his own brothers and if he could not make them agree to lay down their arms, he will step down (*Daily Zamana*, March 9).

The question of an independent state remains a tricky issue, but some moderate Baloch voices say that independence is no longer a priority for the Baloch majority, as they are struggling to survive due to the devastating effect of hostilities on the local economy. The economic structure of Balochistan is where the future of the region begins. Involving local Baloch in the large-scale economic projects proposed for the province will be a major step in winning their confidence; otherwise there is no reason to believe that the tense political situation in Balochistan will not deteriorate further.

Muhammad Tahir is a Prague-based journalist and analyst, specializing in Afghan, Iranian and Central Asian affairs, and is author of Illegal Dating: A Journey into the Private Life of Iran.

Targeting the Khyber Pass: The Taliban’s Spring Offensive

By Andrew McGregor

Taliban Deputy Leader Mullah Bradar Muhammad Akhand announced “a new series of operations” under the code name “Operation *Ebrat*” (Lesson) on March 27. The Taliban’s spring offensive is “aimed at giving the enemy a lesson through directing powerful strikes at it, which it can never expect, until it is forced to end the occupation of Afghanistan and withdraw all the occupier soldiers... We will add to the tactics and experiences of the past years new types of operations. The operations will also be expanded to cover all locations of the country, in order for the enemy to be weighed down everywhere” (*Sawt al-Jihad*, March 28).

There are indications that a main target of the offensive will be the Afghanistan/Pakistan frontier, in particular the strategically vital Khyber Pass.

Citing an improvement in the skills and capacity of the Afghanistan National Army (ANA), Afghanistan's Defense Ministry immediately dismissed the announcement as "a psychological campaign and not a reality which could be implemented on the ground" (AFP, March 25). In reality the situation along the border is extremely precarious and threatens the ability of Coalition forces to operate within Afghanistan.

Joint Intelligence Centers on the Border

The first in a planned series of six joint intelligence centers along the Afghanistan/Pakistan border was opened at the Afghanistan border town of Torkham on March 29. When the plan is fully implemented there will be three such centers on each side of the border at a cost of \$3 million each. There are high hopes for the centers, which have been described by the U.S. commander in Afghanistan as "the cornerstone upon which future cooperative efforts will grow" (*Daily Times* [Lahore], March 30). According to U.S. Brigadier General Joe Votel, "The macro view is to disrupt insurgents from going back and forth, going into Afghanistan and back into Pakistan, too. This is not going to instantly stop the infiltration problem, but it's a good step forward" (*Daily Times*, March 30).

The centers are designed to coordinate intelligence gathering and sharing between the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the intelligence agencies of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The project is an outgrowth of the earlier Joint Intelligence Operations Center (JIOC) established in Kabul in January 2007. This center, comprising 12 ISAF, six Afghan and six Pakistani intelligence officers, was initiated by the Military Intelligence Sharing Working Group, a subcommittee of the Tripartite Plenary Commission of military commanders that meets on a bimonthly basis (American Forces Press Service, January 30, 2007). The JIOC is designed to facilitate intelligence sharing, joint operations planning and an exchange of information on improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The working languages are English, Dari and Pashto, aided by a number of translators.

The new border centers will each be manned by 15 to 20 intelligence agents. One of the main innovations is the ability to view real-time video feeds from U.S.

surveillance aircraft. The commander of U.S. troops in Afghanistan, Major General David Rodriguez, described the centers as "a giant step forward in cooperation, communication and coordination" (*The News* [Karachi], March 29). Despite such glowing descriptions, there remains one hitch—Pakistan's military has yet to make a full commitment to the project. According to Major General Athar Abbas, the director general of Pakistan's Inter-Services Public Relations, a military information organization, "At this time this proposal is being analyzed and evaluated by the concerned officials. But Pakistan has not yet come to a decision on this matter" (*The News*, March 30). General Abbas and other officials have declined to discuss Pakistan's reservations or even to commit to a deadline for a decision. It is possible that the failure to sign on as full partners in the project may have something to do with the stated intention of Pakistan's new prime minister, Yousaf Raza Gilani, to pursue a greater focus on negotiation than military action in dealing with the Taliban and other frontier militants. There may also be reservations on the part of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to share intelligence on their clients within the Taliban.

Actual intelligence cooperation along the border is hampered by a number of factors, not least of which is a basic inability to agree on exactly where the border lies. In the past, Pakistan has responded to complaints from Afghanistan of Taliban fighters infiltrating across the border by threatening to fence or even mine the frontier, a shocking proposal to the Pashtun clans that straddle the artificial divide. Afghanistan's long-standing policy is simply to refuse recognition of the colonial-era Durand Line, which it claims was forced on it by British imperialists in 1893. Pakistan accepts the Durand Line, but the two nations are frequently unable to agree on exactly where the 1,500-mile line is drawn.

U.S. Intervention in the Frontier Region?

The United States is pursuing a number of initiatives to increase security and diminish the influence of the Taliban in the frontier regions of Pakistan, including a massive economic aid program, counter-insurgency training for the Frontier Corps and enhancement of the CIA's monitoring and surveillance abilities in the area (*Dawn* [Karachi], February 26). The CIA already gathers information on the region from over-flights of its unmanned Predator surveillance aircraft, which can also deliver precisely targeted missiles on suspected Taliban safe-houses. Complicating efforts to increase security in the border region is a belief within Pakistan

that the United States is preparing to intervene militarily in Pakistan's frontier region (*The Nation* [Islamabad], March 24).

In a March 30 interview, CIA Director Michael Hayden declared that the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region would be the most probable source for new terrorist attacks on the United States: "If there is another terrorist attack, it will originate there." The CIA chief warned that the situation along the border "presents a clear and present danger to Afghanistan, to Pakistan, and to the West in general and to the United States in particular." Hayden also suggested that Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri were present in the Pakistan tribal frontier, where they were training "operatives who look Western" (NBC, March 30; *Dawn*, March 31).

A spokesman for Pakistan's Foreign Ministry responded angrily to the CIA director's comments, stating that if the United States has information about the whereabouts of the al-Qaeda leadership, it should share it with Pakistan so it can take action. "Such a statement does not help trace alleged hideouts... Terrorists have threatened Pakistan and targeted our people. We are, therefore, combating terrorism in our own interest" (*Daily Times*, April 3). Syed Munawar Hasan, leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami, Pakistan's largest Islamic political party, suggested that Hayden's statements were "white lies," similar to Washington's allegations of weapons of mass destruction in Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Munawar urged the new government to stand fast in the face of what he described as U.S. threats to invade Pakistan despite the establishment of a democratic government (*The News*, April 2). The provincial assembly of the North-West Frontier Province issued a unanimous condemnation of Hayden's remarks (*The Post* [Lahore], April 2; Geo TV News, April 1).

The Torkham Gate

The location of the first joint intelligence center at Torkham reflects the strategic importance of this border town at the Afghanistan end of the fabled Khyber Pass. It is the main gateway for supplies to U.S. and ISAF forces within Afghanistan and is believed to be one of the main targets for the forthcoming Taliban spring offensive (*The Nation*, April 2). Linking Afghanistan's Nangarhar Province and Pakistan's Khyber Agency, Torkham is traditionally the busiest commercial border post between the two countries. A new round of attacks on Torkham may have already begun—as many as 40 oil tankers destined for Coalition forces in Afghanistan

were destroyed in a series of explosions in a Torkham parking lot on March 20 (*Dawn*, March 24). There were 70 to 100 tankers awaiting clearance to cross into Afghanistan at the time.

Only a day before the attack on the tankers, an effort by a U.S. Army colonel to expedite border clearances for military transports at Torkham failed when the chief Pakistani customs official refused to meet with her (*Daily Times*, March 19). Vehicles typically wait in parking lots at Torkham for up to 20 days awaiting clearance to proceed. Part of the problem is due to delays in permits faxed to Torkham from the U.S. base in Bagram—until these are received the vehicles are forbidden to cross into Afghanistan (*Daily Times*, March 27). There are also accusations that some tanker operators may be selling their fuel along the road in Pakistan before deliberately torching their vehicles at Torkham to claim the insurance on the missing load.

Torkham has also become a nearly unregulated transit point for legal and illegal migrants since the demolition of the border gate by the National Highway Authority of Pakistan two years ago. A series of meetings between Afghan and Pakistani officials—attended as well by NATO officials—have been unable to agree on the design and other details of a replacement gate. Smuggling and illegal crossings have spun out of control while tensions between the respective border authorities nearly erupted into open fighting in September 2006 (*Daily Times*, April 2).

Conclusion

Pakistan's reluctance to make a full commitment to intelligence sharing raises a number of difficult questions: Is the ISI still cooperating or even aiding the Afghan Taliban? Do the military and the intelligence services operate outside of political control? Is it possible to collaborate with the Taliban and not the Taliban's allies, al-Qaeda? Why do the better-armed and -trained regular forces frequently relinquish their security role in the frontier regions to the poorly-equipped Pashtun Frontier Corps?

After a meeting on security and terrorism issues with Chief of Army Staff Ashfaq Kayani on April 3, a spokesman for Prime Minister Gillani stated that the prime minister was formulating a comprehensive terrorism strategy "based on political engagement, economic development and backed by a credible military element" (*Daily Times*, April 3). Many within the new government

believe that Musharraf's aggressive military approach to the frontier crisis is responsible for the recent rash of suicide bombings and other attacks that have taken scores of lives across the country.

In the meantime there is a dangerous lack of coordination on border issues in which all parties bear responsibility. There is every indication that the Taliban have identified Torkham as a crucial weak point in the supply and logistics system that maintains the international military presence in Afghanistan. The failure to share intelligence combined with bureaucratic delays and infighting along the Afghanistan/Pakistan frontier threatens the entire Coalition mission in Afghanistan.

Dr. Andrew McGregor is the director of Aberfoyle International Security in Toronto, Canada.