

Ilyas Kashmiri survived last month's airstrike in Pakistan

By Bill RoggioOctober 13, 2009 7:49 AM

A senior al Qaeda leader and longtime Pakistani jihadi with strong ties to Pakistan's military and intelligence services who was thought to have been killed in a US airstrike in the tribal areas has surfaced.

Ilyas Kashmiri, the operational chief of the Harkat-ul Jihad Islami (HuJI) and al Qaeda's Brigade 313, survived [the Sept. 14 airstrike](#) in the village of Turikhel near the town of Mir Ali in Taliban-controlled North Waziristan. Kashmiri was thought to have been killed with Najmuddin Jalolov, the leader of the Islamic Jihad Group, an Uzbek terror group based in Pakistan's tribal areas. Pakistani and US intelligence officials were certain Kashmiri was killed in the attack.

Kashmiri was recently confirmed to be alive by Syed Saleem Shahzad, a reporter for [the Asia Times](#). Kashmiri granted an interview to Shahzad, which will be published on Oct. 14. In the interview, Kashmiri "outlines al Qaeda's master plan to combat the US and its proxies."

Kashmiri is very likely to be directly linked to last weekend's terror assault on Pakistan's Army General Headquarters in Rawalpindi. [Dr. Usman](#), the tactical commander of the assault group, is a senior member of the Harkat-ul Jihad Islami and served under Kashmiri.

Ilyas Kashmiri is considered by US intelligence to be one of al Qaeda's most dangerous commanders. He served as the operational chief of the Harkat-ul Jihad Islami, an al Qaeda-linked terror group that operates in Pakistan, Kashmir, India, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh. Kashmiri was [recently listed](#) as the fourth most wanted terrorist by Pakistan's Interior Ministry.

Kashmiri is thought to have played a major role in [the multi-pronged suicide attack](#) against government and security installations in the eastern Afghan province of Khost in May, the military intelligence official said.

Last year, Kashmiri reportedly drafted a plan to assassinate General Ashfaq Pervez Kiyani, Pakistan's top military officer, but the plan was canceled by al Qaeda's senior leadership, according to a report in the [Asia Times](#).

Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, and several other Pakistani terror groups have merged with al Qaeda in Pakistan, and operate under the name of [Brigade 313](#). This group is interlinked with Pakistan's Taliban and also recruits senior members of Pakistan's military and intelligence services, a senior US

official told *The Long War Journal*.

Brigade 313 has been behind many of the high-profile attacks and bombings inside Pakistan, including multiple assassination attempts against former President Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Gilani. Brigade 313 is one of the six known units in the Lashkar al Zil, [al Qaeda's paramilitary Shadow Army](#).

Kashmiri is also [a longtime asset of Pakistan's military and intelligence services](#). He served as a commando in the elite Special Services Group (SSG), Pakistan's special operations unit trained by Britain's Special Air Service. In the early 1990s, Kashmiri was ordered by the military to join the Harkat-ul Jihad Islami, and later he was urged to join the Jaish-e-Mohammed, which he refused to do.

Kashmiri reportedly dropped out of favor with the military after refusing the military's suggestion to join Jaish-e-Mohammed. In 2003 he was arrested after being accused of involvement in the assassination attempts against then-President Musharraf, and was later released. After the 2007 Pakistani Army assault on the radical Lal Masjid in Islamabad, he set up camp in Ramzak in North Waziristan, and was joined by several Pakistani Army military officers. Kashmiri is widely thought to have maintained his links with the radical elements in Pakistan's military and intelligence services throughout his time operating with jihadi groups.

Kashmiri was behind the assassination of Major General Faisal Alvi, the retired commander of the SSG, in Rawalpindi in late 2008. Alvi was killed just months after [sending a letter](#) to General Kiyani. In the letter, Alvi accused two generals of forcing his retirement. According to [The Times Online](#), Alvi said he was forced to retire after threatening to expose the two generals' involvement with the Taliban.