



# Terrorism Monitor

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Baitullah Mahsud

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## FIRST SUICIDE BOMBING IN MAURITANIA MAY HERALD NEW AL-QAEDA OFFENSIVE

Suicide bombing made its first appearance in Mauritania on August 8 when a man armed with an explosives belt blew himself up outside the walls of Nouakchott's French embassy. The blast killed the bomber and wounded three, including a Mauritanian woman and two French guards. No claim of responsibility was made for the bombing, which came three days after a military coup leader was sworn in as president following a disputed election. Security forces suspect the attack was the work of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

Mauritanian security services fear the bombing was a diversion intended to divert military and security resources from preventing a larger terrorist operation planned for Mali or Algeria (*El-Khabar* [Algiers], August 11). A secondary goal may have been the fulfillment of threats made earlier by AQIM against France and French interests.

Security services are reportedly looking for a Mauritanian explosives expert whose identity was revealed through the interrogation of arrested "Salafi-Jihadists." The man, in his twenties, is believed to have been trained by Algerian terrorist and explosives expert Charef Ben Smar (a.k.a. Abu Khabab). Nevertheless, security officials do not see the presence of a major AQIM leader behind this relatively ineffective terrorist attack (*El-Khabar* [Algiers], August 11).



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Security officials suspect an AQIM unit led by Yahya Djouadi and Abu Anas Abd al-Rahman al-Shinqiti is active in the desert region of eastern Mauritania. Djouadi is the Amir of AQIM's Southern (Sahel) command and a U.S. and U.N. designated terrorist. Djouadi was previously based in northern Mali. Al-Shinqiti is a cleric and native of Mauritania (Bilad al-Shinqit = Land of the Shinqitis, i.e. Mauritania). The AQIM leader recently appeared in a video in which he promised new attacks on Mauritania and Western interests throughout North Africa. Al-Shinqiti found Mauritania's efforts to establish democracy particularly disturbing, claiming it had "extirpated Islam from the state... Democracy will lead to Jewish-American occupation [of Mauritania] and to the proliferation of the parties of Satan" (*El-Khabar*, August 12).

On August 13-14, the military chiefs of staff of Mauritania, Algeria, Mali and Niger met in Tamanrasset to discuss "joint confrontation of the crimes at the borders and in particular terrorism" (*Al-Hayat*, August 13). The military leaders negotiated protocols for "hot pursuit" of terrorist suspects across national borders and the establishment of a joint operations center. Algeria has frequently complained of Malian leniency in dealing with terrorists and the recent military cooperation effort was almost derailed when Mali released three al-Qaeda fighters in a prisoner exchange (*El-Khabar*, August 12).

Paris and Washington have reversed their earlier opposition to the military coup carried out last year by General Muhammad Ould Abd al-Aziz, who deposed Mauritania's first democratically elected president. The General's subsequent election to president on July 23 in a contest denounced locally as a fraud has received warm approval from both France and the United States (*Afrik.com*, August 7; *Al-Ahram Weekly*, July 23-29; *Reuters*, August 5).

In Nouakchott, French Minister for Cooperation Alain Joyandet announced, "With this election, Mauritania has become not only respectable again, but has also become once again for France a key partner in the region" (*Reuters*, August 5). On his return to Paris, Joyandet made clear the reason for the French turnabout. "France was delighted at the democratic election of the new president Aziz who made very strong declarations against terrorism... France is a historic partner of Mauritania and together we want to fight terrorism" (*France 3 TV*, August 9).

## MASSACRE OF PAKISTANI PREACHERS IN SOMALIA REMAINS A MYSTERY

Five Pakistani shaykhs were murdered and two wounded in a vicious attack on a mosque in central Somalia (Shabelle Media Network, August 12). The Islamic preachers were members of the Tablighi Jamaat, a normally non-political Islamic missionary order that originated in India and Pakistan before spreading to East Africa. The victims were among 25 Tablighi shaykhs who arrived in Somalia on August 11. Most came from the Pakistani city of Karachi.

The attack occurred in Galkayo, a city in the Mudug region of central Somalia. Galkayo lies on the southern edge of the semi-autonomous province of Puntland. The administration of Galkayo is disputed – the northern half is administered by the government of Puntland, while the southern half is controlled by the Sufi militia, Ahlu Sunnah wa'l-Jama'a (Xoghaye Media Center, July 8). South Galkayo is the capital of the semi-autonomous state of Galmudug, formed in 2006.

According to witnesses, the Tablighi shaykhs were dragged by masked men from the Towfiq mosque and shot in the street shortly after dawn prayers. The Towfiq mosque, located along the dividing line between north and south Galkayo, is known as a gathering point for Tablighi Jamaat members, including those arriving from Pakistan (Shabelle Media Network, August 12).

Puntland president Abdirahman Muhammad Farole blamed "the administration of South Galkayo" for ordering the killings, but Galmudug officials blamed Puntland (*Reuters*, August 13). There is speculation that the shaykhs may have been suspected by their killers of being al-Qaeda operatives. Somalia's new security minister, Muhammad Abdullahi, was not entirely convinced the deceased were Tablighi missionaries. "Foreign fighters have been using this as cover and acting like preachers in Somalia. Nobody is sure if they were real preachers, but we condemn the killing of people in a mosque" (*Reuters*, August 14). Abdullahi warned Islamic preachers and other foreigners not to come to Somalia without government approval and guidance. Rumors circulating in Galkayo blame Ahlu Sunnah wa'l-Jama'a for the murders, though the movement has denied responsibility and says it is mounting its own investigation (*Garowe Online*, August 12). The growth of the socially conservative Tablighi Jamaat in Somalia has come largely at the expense of the local Sufi orders. A spokesman for Ahlu Sunnah wa'l-Jama'a,

Shaykh Muhammad Abdi Sa'id, said the murders were "contrary to the teaching of Islam" (al-Jazeera, August 13).

A spokesman for the al-Qaeda associated al-Shabaab movement, Shaykh Ali Mahmud Raage (a.k.a. Shaykh Ali Dheere), described the killings as "the worst thing in Somalia's history," adding that the "killing of religious men is unknown among the Somali community" (al-Jazeera, August 13). He blamed the attack on "anti-Islamic elements" and pledged the movement would seek "revenge" for the killings, though he declined to say what group al-Shabaab suspected of responsibility (Garowe Online, August 14; Soomaalidamaanta, August 12).

In Islamabad, Somalia's ambassador was summoned to the Foreign Office to account for the murders (*Daily Times* [Lahore], August 14). Somalia's foreign minister called Pakistan's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs to express the government's condolences and discuss the repatriation of the surviving members of the Tablighi group (*The News* [Islamabad], August 14). At least one Pakistani daily viewed the event with alarm: "Islamabad should not be surprised if Somalia becomes the victim of a full-fledged Pakistani assault and thereafter becomes a base for terrorist operations against Pakistan" (*Daily Times* [Lahore], August 14).

The Galkayo massacre was not the first to target the Tablighi Jamaat in Somalia. On April 19, 2008, Ethiopian troops burst into Mogadishu's al-Hidaya mosque, where they slaughtered 11 Jamaat members as well as another ten civilians outside the mosque. Seven of those killed inside the mosque had their throats slit. The attack came only days after Ethiopian troops arrested 41 Quranic students attending the mosque. Nearly all were released after the Somali government failed to find any evidence of wrongdoing (Garowe Online, April 24, 2008; *Somaliland Times*, April 25, 2008; see also *Terrorism Focus*, April 30, 2008).

## Jihadis Turn their Eyes to Syria as a Post-Iraq Theater of Operations

By Murad Batal al-Shishani

In what might be described as Syria from a jihadist perspective, an article entitled "Al-Qaeda al-Sulbah" (the Solid Base) was posted to the jihadi website al-

Faloja.com on July 21 by active al-Faloja contributor Abu Fadil al-Madi. The article urges Salafi-Jihadis to reconsider the importance of the political and strategic changes in Syria. The title of al-Madi's posting is borrowed from a 1988 article by Palestinian jihad ideologue Abdullah Azzam. [1]

Al-Madi claims there was a kind of agreement between the jihadis and the Syrian regime, an "unannounced agreement to stop mutual hostilities," but the situation has changed since the latter part of 2005. It was then that the regime launched a campaign against "all the components of the Sunnis in Syria; the traditional religious groups (al-Khaznawi Naqshbandiya [a Sufi order] and al-Qubeisyat for example), the Shari'ia institutions (al-Fatah Institute and Abu Nur Institute, in particular), and even against those who were considered to be close allies of the regime, working with all their strength as a trumpet [of the regime] (Muhammad Habash, as an example).[2] As well, there is the fierce security campaign against the Salafi-Jihadi movement, which has escalated since [Fall 2005]."

Al-Madi's post asserts that there is an alliance between the Syrian Alawite regime and Ja'afri-dominated Iran. [3] This alliance, based on the religious links of these two branches of Shi'ism (though not all Shiites recognize the Alawis as Shi'a), created the division in the Middle East between "the Shi'a crescent" and the "moderate axis." Despite these ties, the article claims the Syrian regime is pragmatic in terms of its relations with the United States, especially when it comes to coordination against jihadis. Washington's extradition to Syria of jihadi ideologue Abu Mus'ab al-Suri is an indication of the degree of this cooperation, claims the writer.

Having concluded that the Syrian regime is working hard against Sunnis in general, the writer asks, "What is the Salafi-Jihadi movement's strategic vision for Syria?... Will it remain a potential passage for supplies [to Iraq] or has the time come - or close to it - for a radical strategic change?"

Al-Madi's post states that the jihadi movement has concentrated its efforts on the Iraqi front since 2003 and "developed its political-strategic project by proclaiming the Islamic State of Iraq." However, the geographically sensitive location of Iraq and the international and regional strategic conflict over resources such as oil have pushed both the states of the moderate axis and the Shi'a crescent to try to contain the jihadi movement, penetrate its apparatus and "adapt" it by all means, "each in its own way." Accordingly, the Awakening

councils (al-Sahawat) of Iraq were created by exploiting tribal relations with Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The councils also had connections to Syria, benefitting from the latter's close ties with some Iraqi Ba'athist elements. Al-Madi believes that such policies wasted the efforts of the jihadis since 2007 in a battle of attrition instead of a final battle with "the Crusaders and their supporters in Iraq."

Al-Madi continued by saying that "the fall of the Syrian regime or its collapse into chaos will have a direct impact on the neighboring Sunnis in Iraq and Lebanon, and they will liberate themselves from the constraints on their movement and will find in Syria, a free, important space for movement and supply." In such a scenario the writer thinks that the "fall of Syria" will cut off land transport of Iranian land supplies to Hezbollah in Lebanon. This will equalize the strength of the Lebanese Sunnis with Lebanon's Shi'a community. According to the author, Syria will serve as a backyard to support the fight against Americans in Iraq. "More importantly, the jihadi project will be in direct contact with Israel in an area which is ideal for guerrilla warfare, namely the occupied Golan Heights, without having to fight a costly battle to overcome the Shiite strongholds in southern Lebanon".

The writer concludes that "material interests" in Syria do not exist as they do in Iraq, meaning that international and regional actors will not become involved in armed conflict in Syria as they did in Iraq because any military invasion would be too costly. He also declared that "the planning for change relies on a solid popular base in Syria which never existed in Iraq. The Sunnis, whose rights are prejudiced, are the majority in Syria, while the dominant and well-armed Rafidah (rejectionist) Shi'a do not form more than a quarter of the Syrian population."

Despite the "unannounced agreement" between jihadis and the Syrian regime, the enmity between the parties goes back to the early 1980s, when clashes took place between Syrian authorities and the Muslim Brotherhood. The hostility exists not because there is a close relation between the jihadis and the Muslim Brotherhood, but because that era has played a significant role in shaping the way Islamists in the Arab world regard the Syrian regime. The negative perception of the Syrian Alawite regime can be seen in much of the Arab world's Islamist literature, but is particularly visible in the works of Abu Mus'ab al-Suri.

Al-Madi's article shows that the jihadis in the Levant region are concerned about the influence of Iran, based on their religious differences. The increasing numbers of Syrian fighters that have taken part in jihad activities in Iraq or in Lebanon since the invasion of Iraq in 2003 make the ideas presented in the article crucial. [4] The Salafi-Jihadi movement is in decline in Iraq, but it follows that those jihadis returning to their own countries or new locations could become a potential security problem. Syria is one of the countries that jihadis could aim to turn into a new front after benefitting from its use as a passage to Iraq for the last six years.

*Murad Batal al-Shishani is an Islamic groups and terrorism issues analyst based in London. He is a specialist on Islamic Movements in Chechnya and in the Middle East.*

#### Notes:

1. Abdullah Azzam, *al-Qai'ida al-Salbba* (the Solid Base), *Jihad Magazine*, Issue 41, April 1988.
2. Al-Madi refers here to the Syrian Kurdish branch of the Naqshbandiyya Sufi order led by Ahmad al-Khaznawi. Al-Qubeisyat is a religiously conservative women's organization. Muhammad Habash is director of the moderate Islamic Studies Center in Damascus. For the Abu Nur Institute, see *Terrorism Monitor*, June 4.
3. Al-Madi refers to the Imami Shi'a school of jurisprudence, named for its founder, Ja'afar al-Sadiq, the sixth Shi'a imam. The Alawis are a small but powerful minority in Syria, where most of the population is Sunni Muslim. There is also a small Christian community. Murad Batal al-Shishani, *Ma Ba'ad al-Islam al-Siyasi fi Soria: Abu Mus'ab al-Suri wal-jeel al-Thaleth mn al-Salafeen al-Jihadeen* (Beyond Political Islam in Syria: Abu Mus'ab al-Suri and the Third Generation of the Salafi-Jihadists), in Radwan Ziadeh (ed), *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimeen fi Soria* (Muslim Brotherhood in Syria), al-Misbar Studies and Research Center, Dubai, August 2009.

## The Death of Baitullah Mahsud: A View from Afghanistan

By *Wahidullah Mohammad*

Officials in Afghanistan see the killing of Pakistani Taliban leader Baitullah Mahsud as a great victory for his opponents and say his death may result in the breakup of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) organization. The loss of the TTP leader comes as Pakistani jet fighters and helicopter gunships continue to pound Taliban positions in South Waziristan in preparation for an expected ground offensive.

Baitullah Mahsud was killed in a U.S. drone missile attack on his father-in-law's house in South Waziristan. Although officials in Pakistan, Afghanistan and the United States have stood behind reports of the death of the insurgent leader, the Taliban in Pakistan still insist their leader is alive, an increasingly unsustainable position. The Taliban in Afghanistan have refused comment on this issue.

Hamed Elmi, deputy spokesperson to Afghan president Hamid Karzai, feels certain that Baitullah is dead, but the government is still waiting for more credible evidence of the insurgent leader's death from the Pakistani government [1] Elmi says that Baitullah and his group are linked to al-Qaeda, but his death does not lead the government to expect a decrease in Taliban attacks within Afghanistan. "This is one hundred percent true that the Pakistani Taliban leader is killed... We can see that after he was killed there was a big clash between his two top commanders, Wali-ur-Rahman and Hakimullah Mahsud over who would replace him." Elmi says that the Afghan government wants the Pakistani government to close all those religious madrassas (religious schools) where thousands of Taliban have been trained as terrorist insurgents. "There are hundreds of madrassas on the Pakistan side that are training young boys as terrorists. We want these madrassas to be closed and to be changed into modern schools. Their curriculums should be under government control. We have always insisted the Pakistani government should have control over the religious madrassas. The centers for terrorist training should be destroyed. We also have religious madrassas in different cities of Afghanistan but none of them [are] used for terrorist activities because we have full control over our madrassas."

Elmi said the Defense Ministry was happy with the killing of the Taliban leader. "His death is a big success for the killers and can have a big positive impact not only on the situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan. His death is good for the region and even for the world."

Kabul-based political analyst Fazal Raman Orya says that killing the TTP leader will have a short term positive impact on the security situation in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the region. [2] According to Orya, Mahsud was a main player for Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence and was killed at the ISI's suggestion. "He was very powerful; he had more than 30,000 armed people but sometimes he was not listening to the ISI and was out of their control - that is why they decided to kill him."

Orya says the ISI will now look for a good replacement and will reorganize the TTP structure. "The truth is that ISI wants to replace him with a new person. The new person will be more powerful than Mahsud but he will always be listening to ISI. Once Baitullah is replaced by the new person I think the situation will become much worse in Afghanistan."

Afghan Taliban spokesperson Qari Yusuf Ahmadi refused to speak on the repercussions of the TTP leader's fate, saying that the movement will have comments once Baitullah Mahsud's death is confirmed by the Pakistani Taliban. "We do not want to give any comments on the death of Baitullah Mahsud. His friends have not confirmed his death yet." [3]

General Mohammad Zaher Azimi, spokesperson for Afghanistan's defense ministry, said the ministry is still collecting information regarding Baitullah's death, but says if his elimination is confirmed, it will have a direct positive impact on the security situation in the region and in Afghanistan in particular. General Azimi maintains there was a very close connection between the Taliban, al-Qaeda and Baitullah Mahsud, especially his connection with the Haqqani network in Miramshah. "They were working together to plan suicide attacks in Afghanistan, training and sending suicide bombers into Afghanistan." [4]

General Azimi is confident that the death of Baitullah Mahsud will gradually improve the security situation in Afghanistan. "It won't have a high-speed, positive impact on [the] security situation in Afghanistan and the region very soon, but in the coming few months its positive impact will be seen."

*Wahidullah Mohammad is a freelance journalist in Afghanistan.*

Notes:

1. Hamed Elmi deputy spokesperson to the President Hamed karzai was interviewed on August 12, 2009.
2. Fazal Rahman Orya political analyst was interviewed on August 13, 2009.
3. Taliban Spokesperson Qari Yusuf Ahmadi was contacted on August 12, 2009.
4. General Zahir Azimi spokesperson for the Afghanistan defense ministry was interviewed on August 13 2009. For the Haqqani network, see *Terrorism Monitor*, March 24, 2008; *Terrorism Focus*, July 1, 2008.

## Uncertainty Rather than Stability Follows Defeat of Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers

*By Chietigj Bajpae*

The Sri Lankan government's delay in resettling nearly 300,000 internally displaced ethnic Tamils and failure to address the Tamils' core grievances have led to concerns that these issues might lead to a reversal in the strategic gains made since May's military defeat and decapitation of the leadership of the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Recent developments have confirmed these concerns, including fissures between conciliatory and belligerent factions within LTTE remnant groups, with the belligerents gaining the upper hand, and a pro-LTTE party performing strongly in local elections held recently in former insurgent-held territory.

### Tactical Victory vs. Strategic Ambiguity

The Sri Lankan government led by President Mahinda Rajapakse has undoubtedly secured a significant victory against the Tamil Tiger insurgency since the military renewed its offensive in 2006. The writing was on the wall by July 2007 when the military ousted the LTTE from the Eastern Province in an offensive sparked by a split within the organization three years earlier. The division was between the Prabakaran-led northern faction and the eastern faction led by Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan (alias Karuna Amman), which defected to the government. This was followed by a string of

tactical victories by the military, including the seizure of the LTTE's political and administrative capital of Kilinochchi and its military stronghold of Mullaitivu in January 2009. After controlling one-quarter of the country's territory at one point, the LTTE was reduced to controlling less than 12 square km of land by the end of April. The last nail in the coffin came in May with the reported killing of the LTTE's senior leadership, including supreme leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, political chief Balasingham Nadesan, peace secretariat head Seevaratnam Puleedevan and Prabhakaran's eldest son, Charles Anthony. This was followed by the government's declaration of victory over the LTTE on May 19 (Sri Lanka Ministry of Defence: Public Security, Law and Order, [www.defence.lk](http://www.defence.lk), May 19).

However, despite the loss of the LTTE's conventional military capabilities, territory and senior leadership, the government's declaration of victory in the three-decade conflict may be premature. The LTTE will continue to pose a threat given its disciplined structure, institutionalized fund-collection system and strong support among diaspora communities (as illustrated by sizable demonstrations organized by overseas Tamils in Western Europe, Canada and the United States earlier this year). A renewed full-scale insurgency in the short-to-medium term is unlikely, although pockets of resistance, aided by the proliferation of weapons across the country, could continue to pose a risk. This was demonstrated on July 4 when a Sri Lankan soldier was reportedly shot dead by a LTTE cadre in the eastern district of Batticaloa - the first Sri Lankan military casualty since the cessation of formal hostilities in May (*Times of India*, July 5). At the end of the same month Sri Lankan police reportedly arrested a senior leader of the LTTE's intelligence wing with a quantity of explosives in the Slave Island area of the capital Colombo (Defence.lk, July 29).

While the LTTE's conventional military capabilities have been defeated, the separatists continue to pose a threat through their capacity to revert to guerrilla tactics. An estimated 1,500 to 2,000 insurgents are believed to remain within the country, many of whom are thought to be sleeper cells of the 'Black Tiger' suicide squad. Their existence could result in a surge in asymmetrical attacks taking the form of suicide bombs, roadside bombs and assassinations. Such attacks will likely be concentrated on reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts in the former LTTE-held Northern Province ahead of this year's district, provincial council and presidential elections. The surge in refugee outflows from the war

zone and the ability of LTTE members to blend into the civilian population threatens an expansion of the group's activities throughout the country in the coming months. Given the LTTE's significantly reduced capabilities, any attacks are likely to be opportunistic rather than part of any concerted campaign. These would likely involve high-profile targets, including highly-populated areas, transport and power infrastructure, and government and military personnel and compounds. LTTE remnants could also mutate into "guns for hire," leading to a surge in organized crime, facilitated by the proliferation of significant quantities of weapons following the three-decade civil war.

### The LTTE's Split Personality

With respect to the future of the LTTE, there appears to be a tug of war within the ranks of the remaining organization over its leadership and strategic objectives. The LTTE is moving in two directions; within the country, the loss of its senior leadership following the reported death of Prabhakaran and the destruction of its military capabilities has paved the way for less coordinated attacks led by the LTTE's more hawkish intelligence wing. Notably, the fact that the body of the leader of the LTTE's intelligence wing Shanmugalingam Sivashankar (a.k.a. Pottu Aman) has not been discovered (despite government claims that he was killed) has raised speculation that he is alive and leading remnants of the LTTE within the country (*Asia Times*, June 1).

Outside Sri Lanka, the LTTE has taken a different approach to generating sympathy for the cause by pledging the pursuit of a non-violent struggle. The LTTE's chief of international relations, Selvarasa Pathmanathan (a.k.a. Kumaran Pathmanathan, popularly known as KP), proclaimed the creation of "a provisional transnational government of Tamil Eelam" on June 17, which would pursue "democratic principles" and a "non-violent" path in order to achieve a "political vision towards our freedom" (*Asia Times*, July 27). KP, who held significant influence within the LTTE as the head of its international wing (which controls the group's foreign propaganda and financing), was appointed by the group's executive committee to lead the organization in July (*Times of India*, July 22). This raised the prospect of the LTTE fracturing into a non-violent political movement overseas while a weakened insurgent group continues operations within the country.

However, KP's ambitions were quelled within a month with his arrest in Kuala Lumpur in early August (*The Nation*, Bangkok, August 7; Lanka Daily News, August 7). While this has served to further cripple the LTTE, it may also have given the upper hand to more belligerent factions within the rebel group's remnants. To be sure, KP was no peacemaker; the credibility of KP's pledge to pursue a peaceful path was undermined by his own reputation of being in charge of arms procurement and building up the LTTE's shipping network, used to smuggle arms into the country. Even KP's leadership of the LTTE's international operations was challenged given that he was only promoted to the post in February and many supporters of KP's predecessor, "Castro" (Veerakulasingham Manivannan), continued to oppose KP's leadership (*Asia Times*, June 9). Nonetheless, his removal gives more radical elements the upper hand, which makes a rapprochement between government and pro-LTTE ethnic Tamils less likely.

### Military Victory vs. Political Uncertainty

If continued reports of the mistreatment and marginalization of ethnic Tamils by the government are accurate, a sustainable political solution to the conflict may remain elusive. The military offensive has created a humanitarian crisis, with some 280,000 internally displaced ethnic Tamils who are housed in state-run "welfare camps" (LankaPage, July 21). Reports of the poor living conditions within these camps and other human rights abuses affecting refugees are likely to exacerbate grievances among the country's Tamil minority and prolong hostilities.

The prospects of the government translating its victory into lasting peace will depend on the extent to which it is able to address these grievances by establishing inclusive governance structures and promoting economic development in the Tamil-majority Northern Province. While the government has publicly committed to devolve power to the provincial council, it appears reluctant to implement the full provisions of the devolution plan.

The low voter turnout and unexpectedly strong performance of the pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance (TNA) party in August confirmed that anti-government sentiment remains prevalent in the former insurgent-held territory (*Times of India*, August 10). These polls are a harbinger for the more significant Northern Provincial council elections. The government is now likely to postpone these polls and delay the process

of repatriating internally displaced persons (IDPs) in government-run refugee camps until it can ensure a favorable outcome.

Implementing a sustainable peace and development model in the Northern Province has also been undermined by continued instability in the former LTTE-held Eastern Province. Notably, district and provincial council elections, in February and May 2008 respectively, came under criticism amid allegations of voter intimidation and violence and as a result of the government's alliance with the Tamil People's Liberation Tigers (Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal - TMVP), which is comprised of LTTE defectors and regarded by many as an armed paramilitary group with a reputation for violence and intimidation (ColomboPage, March 25).

Much will depend on who represents Tamil interests in the Northern Province in the absence of the LTTE. The LTTE was effective in eliminating most challengers to its self-proclaimed status as the sole representative of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka. If a party such as the TMVP – which swept the Eastern Provincial Council election in 2008 but is regarded by many Tamils as a puppet of the ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) - emerges as the leading representative of the Tamils in the Northern Province, the credibility of the post-conflict peace process will be undermined.

### Triple Threat: Ethnic Tensions, Military Relations and India's Role

Ensuring harmony between the country's multi-ethnic, multi-religious communities is central to Sri Lanka's future. Along with longstanding tensions between the country's majority Sinhalese and minority Tamil population, there have been indications of a nascent militant movement among the Muslim population in the east. For instance, at least 15 people were killed and 60 others injured in a suicide attack near the Jumma mosque in Matara district earlier this year (*Daily News* [Colombo], March 11; Defense.lk, March 11). While the attack's proximity to the mosque was secondary to the targeting of a government minister, it nonetheless served to fuel grievances among Sri Lankan Muslims, adding a new dimension to the country's instability. Recent reports have alleged the presence of over 18 armed Muslim militant groups in the Eastern Province, with Kathankudy as their base of operations (*Daily Mirror* [Colombo], July 6).

Following three decades of conflict, the Sri Lankan military has also emerged as a significant force in the country's political arena, and restraining its role and influence will be a significant challenge to ensuring a sustainable peace. The military is not likely to be demobilized anytime soon, given its continued importance in disarming LTTE remnants, and the provision of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction in the north. The government has also appeased the military through promotions and arms procurements. Despite growing economic pressures, the national defense budget for 2009 was also increased to an unprecedented 177bn rupees (\$1.6bn), accounting for a fifth of the national budget. Up to 40% of Sinhala families in the country have a family member in the armed forces, while the government announced plans in July to recruit an additional 50,000 security personnel to administer former LTTE-held areas (Defence.lk, July 1).

However, as the government attempts to curtail military spending to address fiscal pressures, friction is likely to develop between the civilian government and the military over the latter's role in the post-LTTE framework. This could set the stage for a Sri Lanka facing problems in civil-military relations similar to those seen in other South Asian countries such as Bangladesh and Pakistan. As such, the demobilization of Sri Lanka's armed forces and any future reintegration of former LTTE combatants will pose a major challenge to the government. Notably, General Sarath Fonseka's promotion to the post of Chief of Defence Staff in July has also been seen as a means to diffuse the powers of the military by dividing responsibilities between Fonseka and new army chief General Jagath Jayasuriya (News.lk, July 12; Tamil News Network, July 19).

Finally, India retains a significant role in bringing about a sustainable resolution to the Tamil insurgency in Sri Lanka given its geographic proximity, political, economic and military weight, and the sympathy generated for the LTTE by their ethnic brethren in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Refugee numbers in India have dwindled as the navies of Sri Lanka and India provide effective policing of the waters across the Palk Strait, but there remain over 75,000 Tamil refugees housed in 117 camps across Tamil Nadu (*Deccan Chronicle*, July 28). Similarly, the LTTE has lost much of its strategic depth in India as a result of the limited influence of the Sri Lanka issue on Tamil Nadu state politics; however, the relaxation of media restrictions in Sri Lanka may return the Tamil issue to prominence in India.



Overt Indian intervention in Sri Lanka remains unlikely following the bloody nose that India suffered following its 1987-90 military intervention. However, India's role in facilitating post-conflict reconstruction and rapprochement is likely to increase in the coming months as the politics of India and Sri Lanka remain inextricably intertwined.

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## The Return of the Kingmaker: Afghanistan's General Dostum Ends his Exile

By Brian Glyn Williams

After seven months in exile in Turkey, General Rashid Dostum, the paramount leader of Afghanistan's Uzbek and Turkmen communities, was given permission by the Karzai government to return to the country. Thousands of his supporters, including many beating drums and chanting "Long live General Dostum!" mobbed him when he landed in Kabul International Airport on the evening of August 16. Rallies were also held in the north, his traditional bailiwick, where Uzbeks predominate. This was the end of Dostum's third exile in Turkey (the previous two being caused by the Taliban in 1997 and 1998 respectively) and cements his status as Afghanistan's most resilient warlord.

Dostum was also reappointed by President Karzai to the symbolic post of Chief of Staff of the Afghan Army. His exile ended with the Afghan government's announcement that, "General Abdul Rashid Dostum can travel abroad and can return home as an Afghan citizen and on the basis of the constitution. He has total freedom in this regard" (Reuters, August 16).

Dostum had traveled to Turkey on December 4, 2008 to visit his family for the Kurban Bayram (Eid al Adha) festival, but was then denied the right to return by the Afghan government. The Turkish press reported that Dostum had in fact been told to leave Afghanistan by

President Karzai (a claim he adamantly rejected). This was seen as a way to punish Dostum, who has previously served as Chief of Staff of the Afghan Army and Deputy Defense Minister, for various acts. The most notable of these was his well publicized physical beating of Akbar Bai, a Turkmen politician and former aide that Dostum believed had betrayed him (see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 17, 2008).

But Dostum's greatest crime in the eyes of the Karzai government seems to have been his role as a grassroots leader among the Uzbeks and related Turkmen of northern Afghanistan. Dostum's Jumbesh Party is among the most organized in all of Afghanistan and often acts in defense of Uzbek rights vis a vis the central government. When President Karzai tried to install an unpopular Pashtun governor in the Uzbek-dominated Faryab Province in 2006, for example, Dostum's Jumbesh followers chased him out. Such acts have been defined by the Karzai government as a challenge to its authority.

Karzai's Ensures his Election

Dostum's return—which once seemed improbable due to pressure from US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to keep him in exile following the publication of a critical article on him in the *New York Times*—was part of a backroom deal with President Karzai. [1] Karzai, indicated by polls as having support from roughly 45% of Afghans, needs to win 50% of the vote in the August 20 contest to avoid a run-off election. Karzai's main opponent, Tajik leader Abdullah Abdullah, is predicted to garner 25% of the vote, but this percentage may increase since Pashtun turnout for the elections in the south is predicted to be lower than in 2004 due to Taliban threats and intimidation. As an ethnic Pashtun, Karzai needs to gain the support of non-Pashtuns from the north to seal his victory over his Tajik opponent, Abdullah. Hence his decision to allow Dostum to return.

Dealing with the Warlords

Karzai has already received endorsements from other key regional leaders who are often simplistically known as *jang salaran* (warlords) by their detractors. These include Ismail Khan, a popular Tajik from the western city of Herat who has been given the post of Minister of Water and Electricity, Gul Agha Sherzai, a notorious Pashtun mujahideen leader from Kandahar who currently serves as governor of Nangahar Province, Karim Khalili, a Hazara leader who has served as

Karzai's Vice President, Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, a Pashtun who represents members of his group in the north, Fahim Khan, a Tajik commander of the Northern Alliance who is running as Karzai's Vice President, and Sher Muhammad Akhonzada, a Pashtun governor of Helmand Province who was removed from his post for involvement in opium smuggling. All of these leaders have brought their ethnic or tribal vote with them for Karzai in return for his support for them in the government.

Such deals have given Karzai's critics ammunition for accusing him of catering to warlords at the expense of democracy. Human rights groups in the West have deplored this "umbrella" approach and the U.S. government has also expressed its concerns. When it received news of Dostum's return, the U.S. embassy expressed its dismay, stating it had "made clear to the government of Afghanistan our serious concerns about the prospective role of Mr. Dostum in today's Afghanistan, particularly during these historic elections. The issues surrounding him become all the more acute with his return to Afghanistan during this period. Among other concerns, his reputed past actions raise questions of his culpability for massive human rights violations" (AP, August 17).

Glib calls for Karzai to cut his ties with leaders like Dostum, however, overlooks one key point to understanding Afghanistan. All politics are local. While foreigners may define men like Dostum as warlords, among their own qawm (tribe, ethnic group or regional community) they are seen as respected leaders. Among the Uzbeks and related Turkmen, for example, Dostum is known as either Baba (Father) or Pasha (Commander). He is seen as a grass roots representative of their people vis a vis Kabul. [2] Any perceived offense to their local leader by the central government can cost it the support of that community. If Dostum was prohibited to return, he promised that his followers would vote for Abdullah Abdullah. This would cost Karzai roughly ten percent of the Afghan vote based upon Dostum's performance as a candidate in the 2004 presidential elections, when he gathered that percentage of support.

#### Dostum's Rise to Political Prominence

Karzai's alliance with Dostum is made easier by the fact that in many ways he defies facile stereotypes of warlords. Unlike many other warlords in Afghanistan, Dostum

was not a fundamentalist mujahid. On the contrary, he first rose to power in the Soviet-backed Communist government of the early 1980s as an anti-mujahideen counterinsurgent. When the anti-Communist jihad ended in 1992, Dostum carved out an autonomous mini-state in the north made up of six Uzbek-dominated provinces based on Mazar-e-Sharif. Dostum's secular realm was overwhelmed by the Taliban in 1998, and he was forced to flee to exile in Turkey.

Dostum returned in April 2001 to fight a horse-mounted insurgent war against the Taliban from a mountain base in the Hindu Kush. When he heard about the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Dostum offered to assist the Americans. On Nov. 9, 2001, he seized the holy city of Mazar-e-Sharif, and this led to the collapse of the Taliban house of cards, thus preventing the United States from having to launch an invasion of the Afghan "graveyard of empires" in winter. Since then Dostum has had an on and off again relationship with Karzai as he has tried to maintain a modicum of autonomy for his people in regards to the central government. But as the Taliban began to infiltrate the north, Dostum was exiled in December 2008.

Afghanistan's ethnic-Uzbeks, who make up 10 percent of the population, threatened they would not vote for President Karzai in the August 20 election if Dostum were unable to return. Most interestingly, the Taliban have made their opposition to Dostum's return clear. In a recent video of captured U.S. soldier Pfc. Bowe R. Bergdahl, the Taliban claimed Dostum and other warlords were guilty of looting, organized crime, mass murders and crimes against humanity (Media Commission of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, July 14). The Taliban have also cynically offered to stop fighting in Helmand Province in the south if Dostum is tried by the Karzai government (International Security Assistance Force, Afghan Mass Media Summary, July 20).

Fearing the loss of the Uzbek vote and a re-infiltration of the Taliban into Dostum's northern lands, Karzai finally agreed to let him return. Since his return, Dostum has begun campaigning for Karzai and ended a split in his Uzbek-dominated Jumbesh Party caused by his departure. His Uzbek and Turkmen followers have promised to vote for Karzai in return for the respect given to the Pasha, Dostum.

## Conclusion

Seen in this light, Dostum, the new Chief of Staff of the Afghan Army, appears poised to give Karzai a victory among his Uzbek ethnic constituency in return for an end to his exile and seat in the government. Dostum's own power in the plains of the north and Karzai's power as president thus appears assured by the quid pro quo.

While many see this sort of Machiavellian politicking as essentially making a deal with the devil, it actually follows Afghan tradition, where the central government has often had little power in the provinces. Traditionally the Afghan president or king made deals with local khans who had real grassroots power, rather than ruling directly. For Karzai, who has been called the "Mayor of Kabul," this is perhaps the best way to keep himself in power, regardless of the public relations fallout his decisions might have among vocal critics in the West who do not have the same grasp of Afghan tribal politics.

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## Notes:

1. The *New York Times* article alleges the killing of "perhaps thousands" of Taliban prisoners of war in November 2001, an event denied by General Dostum. It described this purported incident as "the most significant mass killing in Afghanistan after the 2001 American-led invasion." See James Risen "U.S. Inaction Seen After Taliban P.O.W.'s Died." *New York Times*, July 10. See also *The News* [Islamabad], July 16; *Jang* [Rawalpindi], March 27, 2003.

2. For more on Dostum's role as popular community leader in the plains of Afghan Turkistan see: Brian Glyn Williams. "Writing the Dostum Name. Field Research with an Uzbek Warlord in Afghan Turkistan" *Central Eurasian Studies Review*, Volume 6, no. 1/2. Fall 2007, p.3.