



Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

VOLUME VII, ISSUE 9 ♦ APRIL 10, 2009

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SAUDI AL-QAEDA LEADER OUTLINES NEW STRATEGY AND TACTICS OF AL-QAEDA IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

In a statement delivered on Saudi Arabia's state-owned Al-Ikhbariyah TV, a former leading member of al-Qaeda in Yemen, now in detention in Riyadh, described the revised tactical and strategic approach taken by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, a new organization that combines the Saudi Arabian and Yemeni branches of al-Qaeda (Al-Ikhbariyah TV, March 27). Captured in Afghanistan in 2001, al-Awfi was detained as an enemy combatant in Guantanamo under the name Mohamed Atiq Awayd al-Harbi (prisoner no. 333). In November 2007, al-Awfi was transferred to Saudi Arabia, where he entered the Counseling Program run by Saudi Arabia's Advisory Committee responsible for the rehabilitation of Islamist extremists (see *Terrorism Monitor*, August 16, 2007; January 25, 2008).

Shortly after entering the program, al-Awfi fled Saudi Arabia along with Sa'id Ali al-Shihri "Abu Sayyaf," another former Guantanamo Bay prisoner who was transferred to Saudi custody at the same time as al-Awfi. Al-Shihri became the deputy leader of al-Qaeda in Yemen and is a suspect in last September's car-bombing outside the American Embassy in Sana'a that killed 16 people. The two men headed for Yemen, mainly because it was accessible in comparison to Iraq or Afghanistan.

In January, al-Awfi appeared in a 19-minute video with three other al-Qaeda leaders to announce the unification of the Saudi Arabian and Yemeni chapters of al-Qaeda in a new organization, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Others

in the video included Sa'id al-Shihri, Qasim al-Rimi "Abu-Hurayrah" (military commander) and Abu Basir Nasir al-Wuhayshi, the group's leader (Al-Malahim Establishment for Media Production/al-Fajr Media Center, January 24). Aside from issuing warnings to the "Crusader states" and the Saudi security services, al-Awfi warned "the brothers in prison" against participating in the Saudi rehabilitation program, run by "the ignorant oppressor Muhammad bin Nayif" and "the liar Turki al-Uttayan." He accused the latter of heading a "psychological investigations delegation" to Guantanamo to help extract confessions from prisoners there.

Al-Awfi now maintains he did not want to appear in the January 24 video and argued with the leadership over this issue. Eventually he was ordered to appear in a certain place to make the video, but objected to the message he was told to read. Al-Awfi, who claims the message did not represent his viewpoint or ideas, was told to read it without changes because the wording in the message was carefully chosen. After careful reconsideration of the takfiri approach taken by his al-Qaeda colleagues, al-Awfi crossed back into Saudi Arabia and surrendered himself to authorities in mid-February after first contacting a shaykh at the Advisory Committee (YemenOnline, February 17).

According to al-Awfi, the organization decided on a major change in tactics and strategy, moving away from the methods of former Saudi Arabian al-Qaeda leader Abd al-Aziz bin Abd al-Muhsin al-Miqrin (killed June 18, 2004 after overseeing a number of terrorist blasts and kidnappings). The group's assessment of al-Miqrin's campaign declared al-Miqrin had blundered by concentrating his forces in Riyadh. In the new strategy al-Qaeda would mount attacks in Saudi Arabia from bases in Yemen, leaving only a small group of 30 to 40 individuals in the southern mountains of Saudi Arabia to carry out small-scale operations such as assassinations and sniping attacks. For major operations, a reconnaissance and surveillance team would enter Saudi Arabia to collect detailed intelligence before returning to their base in Yemen, where the operation would be carefully planned. After a major strike the attackers would slip back across the border into Yemen, exhausting Saudi security forces in a fruitless search within Saudi Arabia. Training was to be aimed at producing fighters who could operate on various fronts, including guerrilla fighting, mountain warfare and jungle fighting (Al-Ikhbariyah TV, March 27).

The sincerity of al-Awfi's latest act of repentance was questioned by some in Saudi Arabia; one daily newspaper asked, "How much can we trust Muhammad al-Awfi? ... It is an embarrassment when terrorists continue to fool us with naïve justifications and stories, then try to destroy us once more" (*Jedda al-Madinah*, March 30). Noting his rejection of takfiri ideology, a Saudi economic daily noted: "We hope what al-Awfi has revealed would serve as a clear message to those who might think that al-Qaeda was an organization that seeks jihad in the name of God" (*Al-Iqtisadiyah*, March 28).

FORMER MILITANT DESCRIBES DECLINE OF ISLAMIC MOVEMENT OF UZBEKISTAN

A former member of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Abubakr Xoldorovich Kenjaboyev, appeared on state-owned Uzbek TV on March 30 to describe the decline of the once powerful IMU. Kenjaboyev identifies himself as an ideological leader who joined the IMU in 2000 and later left the Waziristan-based group to form a new group opposed to the leadership of IMU co-founder Qari Tahir Yuldash.

As might be expected, Kenjaboyev devoted much of his interview to attacks on Yuldash (or Yuldashev), a radical preacher and sole leader of the IMU since the death of co-founder Juma Namangani in a November, 2001 U.S. airstrike in Afghanistan. Kenjaboyev alleged that Yuldash and his family enjoyed a life of wealth and comfort, unlike the harsh conditions endured by other members of the movement. The refusal of the IMU leader to adopt the three children of Juma Namangani after his death "tells everything about him."

The former militant said his dispute with Yuldash began when he objected to the Yuldash-approved curriculum of religious instruction and weapons training used in the children's schools of the IMU camps: "If the children are taught worldly subjects, there is the risk that they may begin realizing what is right and what is wrong. The result could be that the orders of the leaders of the Islamic movement will be defied, especially as the IMU members are decreasing in number now. The idea is that [lost members] will be easily replaced if the children are trained to be militants at madrassas."

Since its move to Pakistan's northwest frontier in late 2001, the IMU has steadily lost its political significance and is further away than ever from its goal of establishing an Islamic Caliphate in Central Asia. Stranded in a strange and foreign land with little more than Islam

in common with the local peoples, the IMU has been unable to conduct operations in Central Asia and has likewise failed to integrate itself into the local Taliban movement and join the jihad in Afghanistan or Pakistan in any meaningful way. Lacking purpose, some of the exiled fighters have turned to crime, including those who hire themselves out as assassins. Although they continue to find hospitality from some tribal elements in North Waziristan, the Uzbek militants have suffered steady attrition in numbers from attacks by tribal lashkars and government security forces.

After leaving the IMU, Kenjaboyev says he passed through Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan, where he claims he was twice offered the opportunity of leading a U.S.-funded Islamic movement consisting of other former IMU fighters: “They said the U.S.A. was willing to provide every help we would need... The result they wanted was to create conflicts in certain regions... In this way, they tried to use the flag of Islam as a cover to achieve their personal interests.”

Kenjaboyev estimates that only 100 to 150 fighters are left from an original contingent of over 1,000 men. Despite Yuldash’s efforts to create a second generation of jihadis, many of the remaining fighters “are coming to realize that they were wrong.” If the decline in numbers continues, the IMU “will cease to exist by itself.”

Any interview with an IMU militant on state-controlled Uzbek TV is bound to have occurred under strict political supervision. In this sense the content may be less revealing than the decision to bring it to air. The interview may be seen as an acknowledgement by Tashkent that the IMU is no longer an immediate threat to Uzbekistan, a position that was previously maintained by authorities for political reasons.

Journal of the Turkistan Islamic Party Urges Jihad in China

Murad Batal al-Shishani

The latest issue of a journal entitled *Turkistan al-Muslimah* (Muslim Turkistan) was recently published by a jihadi web forum (muslm.net, March 26). The journal is identified as the work of *al-Hizb al-Islami al-Turkistani* (Turkistan Islamic Party - TIP). The first issue of the journal was originally published on July 2008 by al-Fajr Institute for Islamic Media, which usually publishes materials on the activities of al-

Qaeda affiliated groups in regions such as Afghanistan, North Africa and “East Turkistan” (China’s Xinjiang province). The first issue was republished on jihadi websites in January, with the second issue following in February (almedad.com, January 26; al-faloja.info, February 20).

The three issues are similar to other jihadist journals such as *Sawt al-Jihad* (Voice of Jihad), published by al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia between 2004 and 2007, *Sada al-Malahim* (The Echo of Battles), produced by al-Qaeda in Yemen, or *Qaddaya Jihadiyyh* (Jihadi Issues), published by al-Yaqeen Media Center. *Turkistan al-Muslimah* follows the practice of dividing the articles between political and religious topics, serving as both “alternative” media and a recruitment tool for jihadis.

Turkistan al-Muslimah focuses on Chinese government discrimination against the Turkic Uyghur Muslims of China, while excluding mention of China’s Hui (Han Chinese) Muslims. The journal has the stated aim of revealing “the real situation of our Muslim nation in East Turkistan, which is living under the occupation of the Communist Chinese and to disclose the falsehood of the Chinese government, exposing its crimes [against Muslims] to the world... [we want the] world to understand our cause and rights, that we are seeking our freedom and independence and to be ruled by God’s Shari’a” (Issue 1).

Like other jihadi journals, *Turkistan al-Muslimah* publishes an obituary in each issue for a mujahid killed by the Chinese. The first issue devoted several pages to a profile of the late Hasan Mahsum (a.k.a. Abu Muhammad al-Turkistani - referred to in the journal as “Hasan Makhdoom”), leader of the radical East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) until his death at the hands of Pakistani security services in 2003.

The journal also published a multi-part interview with the leader of the TIP, Amir Abdul Haq. In the first part of the interview, Abdul Haq gave details of his early life and religious education and described his passage to Pakistan and then to Afghanistan. In the second part of the interview, the Amir spoke about the training camps he and his Uyghur colleagues attended in Khost, Bagram, Kabul and Herat in the late 1990s, when Afghanistan was still controlled by Taliban. He informed the readers that the Uyghur group was part of the military wing of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) led by the late Uzbek jihadi commander, Juma Namangani (Issue 3 pp 10-11). The TIP was unknown before it

emerged last year to make unsubstantiated (and often implausible) claims of responsibility for various terrorist actions across China. It also issued threats of biological, chemical and conventional attacks on the 2008 Beijing Olympics, though the group apparently failed to carry out any operations during that period. Little has been heard from the movement since.

In the three issues published so far, the journal shows a proclivity for using the rhetoric favored by al-Qaeda and its affiliate Salafi-Jihadi groups. This can be noticed in the quotes from Salafi theological materials, in the publication of news of jihadi operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere, and in the political rhetoric the journal has adopted. In a section entitled: “Sayings of the Leader Hasan Makhdoom (i.e. Hasan Mahsum),” the second issue of the journal quotes the ETIM leader as saying “preparation for jihad” is an Islamic duty. [1]

The journal has also adopted al-Qaeda’s understanding of the global economic crisis. In an article about the crisis, “Abu Khaled Saifallah” wrote, “The causes of this crisis are: 1) the September 11 [attack] and the destruction of the World Trade buildings, which served as the treasury for the world, thus it speeded up the collapse of the capitalist system of free banking and the destruction of all banks and foreign investment; and 2) The riba [usury]-based system, which is called interest, and is prohibited in Islam” (Issue 2, p.32).

In an article written by an individual identified as Abu Ja’afar al-Mansour, the Qaeda style message appears to be more clear, with the writer issuing a warning to Beijing: “China beware... take a lesson from those who preceded you, the Americans and [their] allies, who were defeated badly in Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia. Do not walk on the same road and do not use the [same] approach in prejudices [against] God’s subjects and in looting their wealth and fortunes, and in shedding the blood of the children...as America is doing in Iraq and Afghanistan” (Issue 3).

The language of the journal is loaded with concepts and phrases used by al-Qaeda and affiliated groups. Abu Umar al-Farouq wrote an article in the third issue of the journal describing Hasan Mahsum as a jihad leader comparable to Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi and Omar al-Baghdadi in Iraq or Abdul Malik Droukdel (a.k.a. Abu Mus’ab Abdul Wadood) in Algeria. The existing issues of the journal show that either the “Turkistan Islamic Party” is trying to associate itself with al-Qaeda and allied Salafi-Jihadi groups or al-Qaeda is aiming to attract “Turkistanis” to their global jihadi movement.

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Notes:

1. One of the first to identify jihad as fard ayn (an individual obligation, or duty) was the Egyptian ideologue of Tanzim al-Jihad, Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj. Faraj’s book, *Al-farida al-gha’iba* (The Absent Duty), became an important part of global jihadi literature. Faraj was executed in 1982 for his role in the assassination of Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat.

Hafiz Gul Bahadur: A Profile of the Leader of the North Waziristan Taliban

By Sadia Sulaiman and Syed Adnan Ali Shah Bukhari

Perhaps no one has greater stature or importance in the Pakistani Taliban leadership than Hafiz Gul Bahadur, supreme commander of the North Waziristani Taliban. A direct descendant of Mirza Ali Khan, a legendary Waziristani freedom fighter who fought against the British Indian government and later against the newly established Pakistani State, Bahadur is known for hosting foreign militants, mainly al-Qaeda and other Arab groups, as well as Maulana Jalaluddin Haqqani of the cross-border Haqqani network.

Hafiz Gul Bahadur is 48 years old and belongs to the Madda Khel clan of the Uthmanzai Wazir. He is a resident of Lwara, a region bordering Afghanistan and is reported to have received his religious education from a Deobandi madrassa (seminary) in Multan (*The Post* [Lahore], August 19). Bahadur subscribes to the Deobandi Islamic revivalist ideology and maintains a political affiliation with the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazal (JUI-F), a Deobandi political party. Bahadur fought in Afghanistan during the anti-Soviet jihad of the 1980s and again during Taliban rule.

The militant leader rose to fame in 2005, when the Pakistani government initiated military operations in North Waziristan Agency (NWA) to evict foreign militants, especially al-Qaeda, from the Tochi river valley. The operations began as fleeing al-Qaeda militants arrived from the adjoining South Waziristan Agency (SWA), where the military conducted incessant operations from October 2003 to February 2005, first against Ahmadzai Wazir (October 2003-April 2004) and later against the Mahsud tribe (April 2004-February 2005). [1] During the course of military operations, Bahadur directed the course of the war against the Pakistani government with two other militant commanders, Maulana Sadiq Noor and Maulana Abdul Khaliq Haqqani.

In June 2006, the NWA Taliban entered into a ceasefire with the Pakistani government that culminated in the infamous September 2006 North Waziristan Peace Agreement. The ceasefire and the agreement were largely made possible due to the involvement of Afghan Taliban leaders such as Maulana Jalaluddin Haqqani and the late Mullah Dadullah. According to reports, a letter signed by Taliban supreme leader Mullah Omar asked “all local and foreign fighters [in North Waziristan] ... not to fight against Pakistan, since this is in the interest of the U.S.” [2] The peace agreement also called for the eviction of foreign militants from North Waziristan, to which Bahadur agreed. This created tension between the foreign militants and Bahadur and also created rifts between the NWA Taliban commanders, some of whom wanted the foreigners to stay. Most of these dissenting Taliban commanders belonged to the Mirali area. Bahadur’s decision was, however, supported by his fellow commanders, Noor and Haqqani. The foreign militants, particularly non-al-Qaeda Arab militants and Central Asian militants (Uzbeks, Tajiks, etc) of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), accused Bahadur and Noor of betraying them by jumping into the government camp to demand their eviction from the tribal territory (*The News* [Islamabad], November 12, 2006).

Before the signing of the September 2006 Peace Agreement, the Central Asian militants expressed their disapproval with the June ceasefire agreement and refused to comply with Bahadur’s directives, saying that they never consented to the agreement. This led Bahadur to assemble a five-member jirga comprised of senior NWA Taliban commanders to negotiate with the Central Asian fighters. According to reports, the jirga sent a clear message to the Central Asians that they had no other choice but to honor the truce (*Daily Times* [Lahore], August 4, 2006).

The conflict between Bahadur and the Central Asian militants arose due to the latter’s interference in the local affairs of the region. However, the Central Asian militants were able to stay in the Mirali area of the Tochi River valley due to support from local Taliban leaders such as Manzoor Daur, who openly opposed Bahadur’s decision to expel the foreign militants. However, Bahadur distinguishes between various militant groups operating in the region and greatly values his relationship with al-Qaeda militants, who have never interfered in local affairs. The eviction decision was, therefore, not intended for al-Qaeda.

After the signing of the peace agreement, Bahadur became the overall head of the NWA Taliban. Unlike South Waziristan, where Taliban groups are divided on a tribal basis – Ahmadzai Wazir and Mahsuds – the NWA Taliban remain united. Taliban from both the Uthmanzai Wazir and Daur Tribes have strengthened Bahadur’s position by accepting him as their supreme commander. Bahadur has established a parallel Taliban government in the region since the peace agreement. In October 2006, the NWA took a major step towards Talibanization when the NWA shura headed by Bahadur issued a pamphlet in which they outlined the levy of new taxes and prescribed harsh penalties for various offenses (*Dawn* [Karachi], October 23, 2006).

The peace agreement broke down in July, 2007 amid accusations by both sides. Bahadur announced an end to the peace accord and ordered his fighters to start guerilla attacks against the security forces deployed in NWA. In August 2007, a new peace initiative was launched by both the sides to bring an end to the fighting. A breakthrough was achieved when a tribal jirga from Orakzai Agency was able to convince both sides to agree to a ceasefire (*The News*, July 17, 2007; August 17, 2007; October 17, 2007).

While the negotiations were going on between the government and Bahadur, the latter joined many other Taliban commanders from various parts of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) to form the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in December 2007. Baitullah Mahsud was chosen as the head of the TTP while Bahadur was appointed first deputy head of the organization. However, Bahadur quickly distanced himself from the terrorist entity after Mullah Omar opposed the formation of the TTP and asked the Pakistani Taliban to focus their attention and resources on Afghanistan (*Asia Times Online*, January 24, 2008).

As the peace negotiations between Bahadur and the government drew to a conclusive end, Pakistani security forces initiated a punitive military operation against Baitullah Mahsud in January 2008. To ward off the pincer movement of the security forces attempting to encircle the commander in the Ladah-Makeen area, Baitullah intended to use the Razmak area of NWA to attack Pakistani security forces. Bahadur, however, barred Mahsud from using NWA territory, saying his peace negotiations with the government were in the final stage and would be jeopardized by Mahsud attacks on security forces. On February 18, 2008, the government and tribes of North Waziristan revived the peace agreement, bringing an end to attacks on government installations and forces (*Daily Times*, February 19, 2008).

Meanwhile, Baitullah Mahsud started expanding his influence in the FATA region after the formation of the TTP and attempted to subdue rival and dissenting Taliban commanders. This alarmed the Ahmadzai Wazir and Uthmanzai Wazir Taliban, who agreed on June 30, 2008 to merge their ranks to form the Muqami Tehrik-e-Taliban (Local Taliban Movement), or the “Waziri alliance.” Hafiz Gul Bahadur assumed the role of the supreme leader, while Mullah Nazir of the Ahmadzai Wazir became his deputy (*Dawn*, July 1, 2008). This alliance proved to be a deterrent to Baitullah Mahsud, as he found his Mahsud tribe encircled from the north, west and south by the Waziri coalition.

A breakthrough was achieved on February 22, 2009, when the three leading Taliban commanders – Hafiz Gul Bahadur, Baitullah Mahsud and Mullah Nazir – formed the Shura Ittihad-ul-Mujahideen (Council for United Holy Warriors) (*The News*, February 23). The three declared they had overcome all of their differences. The newly created alliance is an effort to coordinate their actions in Afghanistan in the face of a renewed focus on Afghanistan by the international community and the pending deployment of an additional 21,000 U.S. troops and 5,000 NATO soldiers in 2009. The alliance was formed under instructions from Mullah Omar, who asked the Pakistani Taliban to abandon their differences and unite their ranks (*Daily Times*, February 24).

Unlike Baitullah Mahsud, both Bahadur and Nazir remain pro-government in the sense that they do not conduct attacks on government property and personnel in FATA and elsewhere in Pakistan, nor do they undertake the Talibanization of the NWFP. Both, however, act free of government control while

conducting cross-border attacks in Afghanistan and carrying out the Talibanization of their tribal lands. Both Bahadur and Nazir are very careful persons, and unlike Baitullah Mahsud, they follow the policy of lying low while advancing their agenda at the same time. Baitullah, on the other hand, is more inclined towards cheap publicity and intends to become the Mullah Omar of Pakistan. Hence, unlike Baitullah, both Bahadur and Nazir maintain a good reputation within their tribal territories, as well as among their respective tribesmen.

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Notes:

[1] The military operations in South Waziristan Agency resulted in the signing of the April 2004 Shakai peace agreement with the Taliban and the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe, and the February 2005 Sararogha peace agreement with the Taliban and the Mahsud tribe.

[2] Graham Usher, “The Pakistan Taliban,” Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP), February 13, 2007, <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero021307.html>

Motivations and Methods of India’s United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA)

By Derek Henry Flood

The United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) has been terrorizing India’s northeastern states since a student-led insurgency began thirty years ago on April 7, 1979. The movement’s primary goal is to achieve a sovereign homeland for the Assamese people. After three decades of political violence, the ULFA shows few signs of abandoning its struggle for an

independent Assam, as demonstrated by a recent pre-election bombing in Guwahati, the state's commercial capital (*Hindustan Times*, April 1). The blast occurred before India's Minister for External Affairs, Pranab Mukherjee, was due to address a campaign rally on behalf of his ruling Congress Party.

The northeast Indian states known as the "Seven Sisters" are an ethno-linguistic archipelago of seething and unresolved conflicts with the central government in Delhi. Assam is the bridgehead both for the northeast region's economy and the Indian security forces counterintelligence operations. ULFA represents the biggest indigenous strategic threat to the "Chicken's Neck," the vulnerable 20 to 40 km wide corridor sandwiched between southeastern Nepal and northwestern Bangladesh that connects West Bengal to Assam. Decades of ULFA insurgency and terrorism have led to the permanent presence of the Indian military (though nothing on the scale of Delhi's forces in Jammu & Kashmir). Thirty years of political violence has been an obstruction to the development of this vital yet impoverished region. Assam is essential for the development of India's crumbling domestic infrastructure and markedly growing economy. Upper Assam state's carbon-based energy resource sector was developed under British rule and bequeathed to the Nehru government at independence. After nationalization via Nehru's socialist inspired policies, it has continued to supply petroleum and coal to the Indian "mainland," while many Assamese who inhabit villages adjacent to petroleum production in Digboi that open pit coal mining in Margherita cook dinner with firewood and eat by candlelight.

Droves of workers from India's Hindi belt have migrated to Assam to cultivate its sprawling tea plantations and chip away at its mines. These mass migrations were encouraged during the British Raj when colonial officials needed vast numbers of laborers to fill the imperial treasuries and have continued unabated to the present day. Thus, the ULFA's primary targets consist of both national and local political elites, the security forces and the Hindi-speaking migrant laborers (primarily from the poverty-stricken eastern Indian state of Bihar). A dominant factor in ULFA's *raison d'être* is an anti-migration sentiment mixed with linguistic chauvinism toward outsiders. The ULFA's xenophobic doctrine insists that the influx of illiterate migrants into the state's labor pool drowns out indigenous Assamese culture and leaves locals out of participating in their own rightful industries.

Critics in the Indian security establishment point to inconsistencies in the group's rationale; the ULFA is vehemently against internal economic migration from within India but remains relatively silent on the illegal immigration of Bengali-speaking Muslims from Bangladesh (Rediff January 9, 2007). This contradiction is regarded by Indian officials as *de facto* evidence of the involvement of Bangladesh's Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), which Delhi believes to be supported by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) (Rediff.com, January 17, 2007).

Though links to regional Islamist groups are often ascribed to unnamed government officials in Delhi or the Assamese state capital of Dispur the ULFA differs from the many militant Islamist groups operating on the sub-continent by being Hindu in origin and militantly ethno-nationalist in nature, not unlike the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka (*Times of India*, October 21, 2004). Any coordination between the ULFA and religiously motivated non-state actors in Bangladesh and Pakistan would be of an operational nature based on temporarily dovetailing interests rather than any ideological commonality. Delhi seeks to emphasize the ULFA's Islamist/terrorist connections through the national press, though publicly it presents scant empirical evidence to make such a case (*Economic Times* [New Delhi], February 7). Indian authorities and the Indian press seek to link the group to ISI-sponsored Islamist groups in Bangladesh and directly to the ISI itself.

The ULFA's theater of operations and training is or has been comprised of the Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan, the predominantly Muslim hereditary democracy of Bangladesh, the Orwellian state of Myanmar and Nagaland, home of a predominantly Baptist revolutionary movement. The ULFA fights and terrorizes within an astonishingly Balkanized belt of ethnic and religious diversity. ULFA activities are rarely reported in the Western press unless they produce a mass casualty attack, such as the January, 2007 incident in which approximately 70 Bihari civilians were killed in a multi-day orgy of violence (Bloomberg, January 8, 2007). These attacks are partly aimed at disrupting the Assamese and Indian economy. Often when Bihari civilians are attacked they flee Assam en masse, leaving the state devoid of much needed labor.

Looking Eastward

Following the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi by a teenage

Sri Lankan Tamil suicide bomber in 1991, India moved from an idealistic Nehruvian foreign policy into an era of realpolitik under the leadership of P.V. Narasimha Rao. India's traditional support for democracy in Burma and its vanguard, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, was put on the back burner in favor of creating trade relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Several of India's northeastern insurgent movements maintained bases in the jungles of northern Myanmar, including the ULFA and the bitterly split factions of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland. The ULFA insurgency in northeast India stands in the way of India rebuilding the historic Stillwell Road that connects the region to China's Yunnan province via Myanmar (*Times of India*, April, 11 2005).

A Roadblock to Regional Integration

Suppressing insurgency in Assam is an essential element of India's "Look East" policy, as Delhi seeks to enhance trade linkages and military cooperation in Southeast Asia. If Assam is the gateway to India's turbulent northeast, than Myanmar is India's gateway onward to Southeast Asia. After the ULFA was largely expelled from its Bhutanese camps by the kingdom's security forces in the 2003 Indian-assisted "Operation All Clear," the Indian government has since sought to encourage the Burmese junta of General Than Shwe to expel ULFA rebels from its territory (which would leave Bangladesh as ULFA's last external training center) in exchange for closer military-military and commercial ties (*Times of India*, December 30, 2003). The armies of Myanmar and India staged the "India-Myanmar Friendship Rally" in 2006 under the guise of memorializing the collective loss of Allied indigenous soldiers in WWII.

The impetus for India engaging Myanmar is twofold. Primarily, India is uneasy with Chinese expansion into Myanmar as China seeks out resources and blue water ports to meet rapidly increasing domestic consumption demands and strengthen its influence in the broader Southeast Asian/Indian Ocean realm. Secondly, India is seeking to exploit natural gas fields and other resources, along with China and South Korea, off western Myanmar's Arakan coast (*Asia Times*, April 3). Creating pipelines, reviving WWII colonial era roads and turning a blind eye to human rights are factors in India's new relations with the Than Shwe government. The ULFA and its goal of Assamese secession is a nagging impediment to Delhi's belated plans for development of the Northeast necessary for integration with ASEAN.

Methods of Terror

ULFA guerrillas, who are routinely referred to in the Indian press as "cadres" or "ultras," routinely extort money from sprawling tea estates that blanket Upper Assam and target estate officials for kidnapping and assassination (*The Telegraph* [Kolkata] November 30, 2008). Tea estate workers in Upper Assam interviewed by the author described night visits by ULFA insurgents demanding cash, food and silence on the group's movements in exchange for remaining unharmed. The workers, primarily Bihari peasants, said that while the Indian Army controls the roads in Tinsukia district during the day, the ULFA operates freely at night. ULFA members occasionally slaughter groups of Biharis to demonstrate the reality of their threats.

In Assam's urban centers, ULFA members commonly plant explosive devices on motorcycles and bicycles, hurl grenades into unsuspecting marketplaces and place bombs in rubbish bins to make their point (*Telegraph*, March 26, 2008). The ULFA also instructs whole commercial districts to commence bandhs, or strikes, where guerillas force commerce to come to a halt under threat of violence. Shop owners seen conducting business during a bandh may be killed or have their enterprises destroyed for disobeying an ULFA ultimatum. By issuing bandh diktats, ULFA leaders seek to send a message of immense dissatisfaction to Delhi and punish local leadership in Dispur for its perceived intransigence.

Though the Indian government has had a certain degree of success with getting particular factions of northeastern insurgent groups to demilitarize and surrender, there always seems to be hardcore elements within these fissiparous, personality-driven movements that are irreconcilable to anything less than their stated aims. The "Charlie" and "Alpha" companies of the ULFA's 28th Battalion, allegedly based in Myanmar, have ceremonially surrendered and agreed to ceasefires while other irreconcilable elements within the movement have yet to come in from the cold (*The Hindu*, June, 25 2008).

Conclusion

At the thirtieth anniversary of ULFA's founding, the group and its activities in Assam show few signs of genuinely abating despite pronouncements by Indian authorities to the contrary. The ULFA's military leader, Paresh Barua, also appears no closer to being apprehended in his sanctuary in neighboring

Bangladesh, though negotiations on the ULFA issue are under way following the election of the pro-India Awami League government in Dhaka. As the Indian military's primary focus will likely remain along its western frontier with Pakistan and maintaining one of the world's largest military occupations (and subsequent counterintelligence operations) in Jammu & Kashmir, it will be very difficult for Delhi to dismantle the ULFA in the long term. The ULFA has suffered military and logistical setbacks in recent years but not nearly enough to bring the organization to an end. The grievances that have fostered the Assamese insurgency, primarily allocation of resources, unfettered migration from the Hindi-speaking belt and prospects for Assamese independence, are unlikely to be addressed by the central government. With India and China in competition throughout this complex region while still retaining a degree of distrust stemming from unresolved territorial disputes in the aftermath of the 1962 Sino-Indian war, prospects for a comprehensive regional peace process are highly unlikely. Economic interdependence between Asian powers is moving ahead faster than the resolution of long standing ethno-nationalist grievances (with their suspected foreign sponsors) and trade may ultimately trump diplomacy in this bitterly contested region.

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UK Charity Funding Arms and Training for Bangladeshi Terrorists

By James Brandon

Bangladeshi police reported in March that they had discovered an apparent bomb-factory in a madrassa in the district of Bhola, a relatively remote part of southern Bangladesh. Police reported the discovery of 10 firearms and 2,500 rounds of ammunition in the madrassa, along with books by writers such as

Abu Ala Maududi, the founder of Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami, an Islamist political party (*Daily Star* [Dhaka], March 26; Bangladesh News 24 Hours, March 26). It quickly became clear that the madrassa was funded and run by Green Crescent, a UK-registered charity based in Manchester, England. Bangladeshi police described the madrassa as a "mini-ordnance factory," adding it was used to train militants (BBC, March 25). Bangladeshi media speculated that the madrassa is linked to Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), an Islamist militant group that has carried out several prominent attacks in Bangladesh in recent years (*Daily Star*, March 26).

Upon raiding the madrassa, police immediately arrested four employees they found at the scene. They also began a nation-wide search for Dr. Faisal Mostafa, the head of the charity, with Bangladeshi police reporting his arrest on April 6 (*Daily Star*, April 7; bdnews24.com, April 7). There were widespread reports that the police held him for as long as ten days before announcing his arrest. Mostafa's family has claimed that their son is innocent of all the accusations, denying reports of the bomb factory and saying that their son was only a "hunter" who made his own ammunition (*Guardian*, March 27). Although the charity was based in the UK, British police have not yet made any arrests relating to the developments in Bangladesh.

The investigation into the Green Crescent charity comes at a time of heightened tensions in Bangladesh. Only a few weeks earlier, a February revolt by members of the country's Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) border guards occurred in Dhaka, the Bangladeshi capital. Nearly 70 army officers were brutally massacred in the mutiny. Although the government has said that the revolt was caused by low pay and poor conditions, there has also been speculation that Islamist militants were involved. The best known of the murdered officers was Colonel Gulzar Uddin Ahmed, whose mutilated remains had to be identified by DNA testing. Only recently appointed to the command of the BDR, Colonel Gulzar had specialized in counterterrorism operations as chief of intelligence and later commander of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB). He led numerous anti-terrorist operations against the JMB, Harkat ul-Jihad-e-Islami (HuJI) and other militant groups. Dhaka's *Daily Star* said that his brutal murder suggested his killers were militants "fed by a deep-seated grudge" (*Daily Star*, March 12). As investigators probe the background of each mutineer for past affiliations with radical groups, Commerce Minister Faruk Khan, who is heading the

investigation, pointed to infiltration of the BDR by militant groups such as the JMB (*Daily Star*, April 5).

The news that the madrassa was apparently run and funded from the UK has wider implications beyond Bangladesh - over 500,000 Muslims of Bangladeshi origin have British citizenship in the UK and as a result enjoy visa-free travel to the United States, Europe and elsewhere. Although most British Muslims involved in Islamist militancy have been of Pakistani origin, the discovery of apparent British links to Bangladeshi militancy is a potentially disturbing development. Increasing militancy among British Bangladeshis would further complicate the task of British and international security services who are already struggling to contain Islamist terrorism originating in the UK.

Faisal Mostafa and the Green Crescent

Faisal Mostafa is the head of the Green Crescent's charity operations in Bangladesh and is registered by the UK charity commission as the charity's chief trustee. Mostafa, who has a Ph.D. in chemistry, has been charged three times for weapons offenses and possession of explosives and bomb components. In 1996 he was arrested and tried for conspiring to cause explosions after bomb-making equipment was discovered in his house. He was acquitted of this charge after claiming he was writing a book on explosives, but was found guilty of possessing a pistol with intent to endanger life. In 2000, he was arrested again and charged with planning to cause explosions after police discovered a large cache of explosives in Birmingham. In 2002, he was acquitted - although his co-defendant was convicted and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment on the same charge (*Telegraph*, March 26). In 2008, Mostafa was given a suspended prison sentence after trying to take a gas-powered gun onto an airliner from the UK to Bangladesh. The court accepted his defense that the gun was solely for hunting purposes.

Mostafa's case is interesting in several respects. Although he is of Bangladeshi ethnic origin, Mostafa lives in Manchester in the British Midlands, whereas most Bangladeshis in the UK live in London. Although his co-defendant from the 2002 trial was also of Bangladeshi origin, there is little evidence so far that Mostafa has been involved with Bangladeshi-based militant groups. There is also little evidence that he had connections to any UK-based extremist groups such as al-Muhajiroun or the Finsbury Park mosque. An interesting inclusion on the list of trustees of the Green Crescent charity is Andreas "Hamza" Tzortzis, a convert to Islam who is

a regular speaker at Islamist events, particularly those on British university campuses. [1] Tzortzis is closely linked to the Hizb ut-Tahrir group, accused of inspiring a number of terrorist attacks in the UK and abroad. It is additionally striking that although Mostafa has been connected to several terrorism plots, the UK Charity Commission (whose remit specifically includes tackling terrorist use of charities' tax-free status) did not interfere with his running of a charity that sent money to Bangladesh.

Rising concerns

At this stage, Mostafa seems not to have been part of any formal UK-based Islamist groups while still having a number of complex and long-standing connections to British individuals involved in Islamist extremism. He also seems to have had only limited connections to the wider British Bangladeshi community - if only because he was based in Manchester rather than London. This gives reason to think that his apparent involvement in running a militant training camp in Bangladesh does not necessarily indicate that British Muslims of Bengali origin are more likely to become involved in militancy.

Historically, British Bengalis, despite suffering disproportionate levels of unemployment, under-education and ghettoization, have very rarely become involved in Islamist militancy - compared, for instance, to British Muslims of Pakistani origin, which make up the overwhelming majority of those convicted of terrorism in the UK. This is partly because Bangladesh does not have a culture of tribal warfare or sectarian conflict on a par with Pakistan or parts of the Arab world or East Africa. In addition, the relatively stable nature of Bangladesh (and its relatively settled borders) means that British Bengalis travelling to their "home" country do not have the same opportunities to receive military training compared to British Pakistanis returning to their places of origin.

The case of the Green Crescent charity comes as the British government grows increasingly concerned about possible links between British Islamists and militant groups in Bangladesh. In April 2008, British Home Secretary Jacqui Smith travelled to Dhaka where she announced that the UK and Bangladesh would form a "joint working group" to implement closer anti-terrorism operations between the two countries (*Daily Star*, April 10, 2008). More recently, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, is reported to have asked the UK to provide additional counter-terrorism support

in Bangladesh (VOA, January 17). These high-level contacts come in the context of wider concerns. For example, in July 2007, the *Guardian* cited British officials as saying that the number of British-Bangladeshi would-be terrorists was increasing (*Guardian*, July 9, 2007). A grenade attack by HuJI members on the British High Commissioner to Bangladesh in 2004 also doubtlessly helped focus civil servant minds on the problem of Bangladeshi militancy.

In addition, there are a wide variety of historic links between Islamist extremists in the UK and those in Bangladesh. In East London, where most British Bengalis live, almost all of the most prominent Islamic buildings, institutes and organizations are closely linked to the Bangladeshi wing of Jamaat-e-Islami. For example, the East London Mosque is dominated by members of Islamic Forum Europe, JI's British wing. A senior member of the organization, Chowdhury Mueen Uddin, a trustee of the East London Mosque, has even been accused of carrying out extra-judicial killings during Bangladesh's 1971 War of Independence as a member of JI's student wing, which had sided with the Pakistani army against the Bengali nationalists. [2] Furthermore, there are extensive links between Hizb-ut-Tahrir's UK and Bangladeshi branches. For example, the Bangladeshi branch of Hizb ut-Tahrir was set up by Dr Nasim Ghani, the leader of Hizb ut-Tahrir in the UK. [3]

Conclusion

Although the investigation into Faisal Mostafa and the Green Crescent charity remains in its early stages, it is clear that this is already a significant case. It has uncovered potential serious problems with the UK charity commission's oversight process – raising the possibility that terrorist groups might still be enjoying tax-free status in the UK. It is also an important reminder that it is not only terrorist groups based in the Middle East and the Afghanistan-Pakistan region that are potentially seeking to work with Islamists in the West – Bangladeshi groups might also be hoping to do the same. The Green Crescent case is also a reminder that Bangladesh suffers from many of the same problems as Pakistan. Although the challenges facing Bangladesh are less acute, the same sort of problems may exist there. For example, it is likely that Bangladesh terrorist groups would be willing to provide military training for Muslims living in the West – just as Pakistani groups have done. Likewise, it is possible Bangladeshi militant groups could be seeking to use funds from emigrants in the west to fund their

operations in South Asia.

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Notes

1. <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/ShowCharity/RegisterOfCharities/ContactAndTrustees.aspx?RegisteredCharityNumber=1099233&SubsidiaryNumber=0>
2. <http://www.genocidebangladesh.org/?p=296>
3. Author's interview with Ed Husain, former member of Hizb ut-Tahrir, April 2009.