



Terrorism Monitor

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Bekkay Harrach

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“NO MIRACLES IN THE WAR ON TERROR”: TURKISH CHIEF OF STAFF COMMENTS ON CONFLICT WITH THE PKK

In a live speech carried by Turkish media on September 21, Turkish Chief of Staff General Ilker Basbug maintained that the Turkish Armed Forces (Turk Silahlı Kuvvetleri – TSK) is seeking to end the bloodshed between Turks and the ethnic Kurds of southeast Turkey, blaming the continuing conflict on “the separatist terrorist organization” (i.e. the Kurdistan Workers Party or Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan –PKK) (*Milliyet*, September 23; *Hurriyet*, September 22; *Anatolia*, September 21). The General was in the Nusaybin district of the southeastern province of Mardin at the time, accompanied by most of the senior command of the TSK.

General Basbug identified three main responsibilities ascribed to the TSK regarding the struggle with the PKK:

- Ensuring the security of the people of southeast Turkey and protecting them from “the repression of the terrorist organization.”
- Preventing unauthorized entries and exits through border regions.
- Establishing territorial control of the countryside and seeking, finding and neutralizing terrorists.

The Chief of Staff noted that most PKK volunteers are dead by the age of 26, advising the PKK's young fighters that the only way out is to disarm.

Among the most controversial parts of the address were the General's remarks on Kurdish language education, which appeared to be at odds with the government's willingness to re-examine this controversial issue. "According to Article 3 of our Constitution, Turkish is our official language. Turkish is our common language of communication. It is also the language of the economy. The road that leads to prosperity passes through Turkish." Vatan columnist and Jamestown contributor Rusen Cakir noted, "There are serious disagreements between the government and the TSK about the anticipated cultural and political steps," despite their shared views about the limits of the peace process (*Vatan*, September 24).

General Basbug's speech came only days after Turkey's domestic intelligence service, the Milli Istihbarat Teskilati (National Intelligence Organization – MIT), issued a warning to all Turkish security agencies that PKK cadres had ordered the commencement of the "serhildan" (uprising) process in response to the government's failure to release imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan's "roadmap" to a resolution of the Kurdish dispute. According to the MIT, the uprising will take the form of setting fires (especially to private vehicles), resistance to the police and attacks using stones and sticks (*Milliyet*, September 20; *Hurriyet*, September 27; *Radikal*, September 30).

In an interview conducted after the General's address, Basbug commented on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's recent statement that Syria might be prepared to pardon PKK militants in Syria who lay down their arms and surrender. "We embrace anyone who lays down arms because our goal is not to take revenge but to end terrorism. We cannot end terrorism by hunting terrorists. Because every terrorist killed is replaced by another one" (*Today's Zaman*, September 17; *Milliyet*, September 24). Many of the PKK's most militant commanders come from Syria. Assad's suggestion was interpreted by some as a prod to the Turkish government to consider a general amnesty to advance the peace process (*Today's Zaman*, September 17). General Basbug suggested that such an amnesty would be useful, but would be unlikely to bring all the fighters in at once. "There can be no miracles in the war on terror." According to the General, financial support from sources in Europe must

also be cut off. "You have to fight with all your strength on all fronts."

Basbug also pointed out the important role of economic reforms in battling terrorism, noting that the average Turkish citizen "wants employment, bread on the table and education... If these problems are solved, these people can become less vulnerable to exploitation by the terrorist organization [i.e. the PKK]. We must make people more resistant to terrorism" (*Milliyet*, September 24). Some Turkish commentators described the General's remarks as a return to military involvement in Turkish politics (*Hurriyet*, September 25).

IRANIAN NAVY STRUGGLES TO COMBAT PIRACY OFF SOMALIA

While official and semi-official Iranian news sources reported a successful action by the Iranian navy against Somali pirates on September 21, there are serious questions regarding the scale and effectiveness of Iran's naval operations in the Gulf of Aden. According to the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), two Iranian warships repelled Somali pirates attempting to hijack three Iranian merchant vessels off the Somali coast (IRNA, September 21; Press TV [Tehran], September 20; Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran Radio One, September 19; Fars News Agency, September 21).

Iran has made impressive claims about the role of Iranian ships in the Gulf of Aden. According to Rear Admiral Fariborz Qaderpanah, "Protecting security of tankers, vessels and trade cargo ships has won us international admiration and this indicates the exemplary might and capacity of [Iran's] naval forces at the regional and global levels" (Tehran Times, September 1). The Iranian media is full of descriptions of the impressive deployment of the battleship IRIS Khark and the destroyer IRIS Sabalan, the third such Iranian naval deployment in the region since May 2009. Iranian spokesmen claim that the navy has escorted hundreds of Iranian vessels and over 50 foreign vessels that had asked for their assistance in passing through the troubled waters off the Somali coast. Iranian naval commander Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari announced in July that Iranian ships had "nearly abolished the phenomenon of piracy" in the region (Fars News Agency, July 23).

The reality of the Iranian deployment is somewhat different, however. While much of the international media has repeated official accounts of the deployment

of an Iranian battleship and destroyer to the Gulf of Aden on September 1, it does not appear to have occurred to these sources that the last battleships in the world (belonging to the United States) were decommissioned some 15 years ago, or that the stated deployment of 388 sailors would be woefully small to man such a flotilla. Iran not only has no battleships, it has no capital ships of any type. The Khark (or Kharg) is not even a warship, but rather a 33,000 ton Olwen class Replenishment ship, built in Britain c.1977. The Sabalan is not a destroyer, but is a relatively small, British-built, 1971 vintage Alvand class frigate. Its main armament is Chinese missiles that replaced the original British missiles in a refit. Iran has two American-built World War II vintage Allen M. Sumner class destroyers purchased by the Shah of Iran in the early 1970s, as well as one British-built destroyer of similar vintage, purchased by Iran in 1966. All three of these destroyers are no longer on active service, making frigates Iran's most formidable warships.

Warships from over 20 countries currently patrol the waters off the Somali coast in an effort to protect commercial shipping from the depredations of Somalia-based pirates, most of whom operate out of the relatively stable autonomous region of Puntland. Like the Chinese and Russian naval deployments off Somalia, the Iranian ships operate independently of the international Combined Task Force (CTF-151) (see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 24). Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) gave its approval to the first Iranian naval deployment last May with the understanding that the Iranian mission would last until October 21, 2009 (Kuwait News Agency, May 20).

International Maritime Organization (IMO) Secretary-General Efthimios E. Mitropoulos applauded Iranian anti-piracy efforts in the Gulf in mid-September (U.N. News Centre, September 17). Mitropoulos was in Tehran for meetings with Saeed Jalili, the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC). While the IMO chief praised Iran's mission to restore security in the Gulf of Aden, Saeed Jalili took the opportunity to describe the presence of "alien warships" in the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea as "modern piracy" (Fars News Agency, September 15).

While the average deployment of a naval force in foreign waters is six months, Iran's deployment period has averaged only two months thus far, which suggests that Iran is either experiencing difficulty in maintaining

its deployments, or is attempting to give experience in active operations to as many naval personnel as possible.

The current deployment replaces the IRIS Alborz and the IRIS Bushehr. Though both of these ships were presented as "warships" in Iranian press reports, the Alborz is a British-built 1971 vintage Alvand class frigate, while the Bushehr is a Bandar Abbas class Light Replenishment Ship built in Germany in 1974. The Iranian ships operate out of the naval port at Bandar Abbas.

The Iranian naval presence has not been welcomed by all in the region. In Yemen, Nasserite opposition leader Muhammad al-Sabri stated that the Iranian naval mission was an indication of imminent Iranian intervention in the conflict raging in Saada province between the government and Zaydi Shiite rebels (Sahwa Net, August 31).

Attempt on the Life of Lebanon's Grand Mufti Marks the Return of Salafi-Jihadi Operations to Lebanon

By Murad Batal al-Shishani

Reports emerged on September 21 that Lebanon's Forces de Sécurité Intérieure (FSI) had been placed on high alert in Beirut following the discovery of an alleged plot to assassinate Lebanon's most prominent Sunni cleric, Grand Mufti Shaykh Muhammad Rashid Qabbani (*al-Anba'a* [Kuwait], September 21). According to a security source, the plan was to kill the Grand Mufti by way of a suicide bombing inside the Muhammad al-Amin mosque in downtown Beirut (*Daily Star* [Beirut], September 22; September 23).

Born in 1942, Qabbani became acting Mufti after the unsolved assassination of Mufti Hassan Khalid by a car bomb in 1989. He was formally elected as Grand Mufti in 1996. Shaykh Qabbani is the highest religious authority for Lebanon's Sunni Muslims.

Grand Mufti Qabbani initially downplayed the gravity of the plot, saying that reports of the threat were "within the framework of efforts to disrupt political

and constitutional functions in Lebanon.” The Mufti added that the publication of such reports was aimed at “spreading fear among the citizens, as well as destabilizing security and stability in Lebanon” (*al-Nahar* [Beirut], September 22). The Mufti later spoke in vague terms about the alleged plot, saying, “We are not a source of information. The state and its security services are the ones who control the country’s security, safety and stability.” Regarding his own safety, Mufti Qabbani quoted the Quran: “Nothing will happen to us except what Allah has decreed for us” (*al-Anba’a*, September 23).

Despite the Mufti’s remarks, Lebanese politicians and religious leaders such as Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Boutros Sfayr strongly condemned the alleged plot (iloubnan.info, September 22). On September 22, the Mufti received a military delegation consisting of senior members of the army and the Lebanese intelligence security services, who were reported to have passed on details of the assassination plot to the Mufti (elnashra.com, September 22; *al-Hayat*, September 23). The reaction of various Lebanese leaders and security officials suggests there was indeed some substance to reports of a foiled assassination attempt.

While it is impossible at this stage to confirm who stands behind the alleged assassination attempt, early indications appear to show that Lebanon’s Salafi-Jihadi movement could be involved. A website belonging to Michel Aoun’s Free Patriotic Movement quoted a Murr TV broadcast (MTV – a Lebanese satellite channel) in which security sources revealed there are two accounts regarding the alleged attempt to assassinate the Grand Mufti. The first concerns individuals belonging to al-Qaeda who arrived in Beirut from the Rashidiya refugee camp (south of Tyre) wearing explosive belts. The story claimed that one of them was arrested and the security forces are searching for the other operative. The second account refers to a group that came from the northern border region of Lebanon. An individual belonging to this group was arrested and the search is underway for others. Sources quoted by MTV believe that the first account is the most accurate (Tayyar.org, September 26).

The report on the attempt on the Mufti’s life coincided with another report which states that terrorist cells within Lebanon are flourishing. Members of Fatah al-Islam were reportedly infiltrating several Palestinian refugee camps within Lebanon with a view to carry out

attacks on peacekeepers belonging to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), as well as various Palestinian and Lebanese officials (*Al-Rai* [Kuwait], September 23; *Daily Star*, September 23).

If the link between the attempt on the Mufti’s life and al-Qaeda affiliated groups like Fatah al-Islam is confirmed, it illustrates two developments regarding such groups on both local and international levels; on the local Lebanese level it suggests that Fatah al-Islam continues to operate in Lebanon two years after their defeat, following a three month siege by the Lebanese Forces at the Nahr al-Barid Palestinian refugee camp. Al-Qaeda and Fatah al-Islam sympathizers are in opposition to Mufti Qabbani and accuse him of “justifying” the fight against them and issuing a fatwa (religious ruling) that permitted the demolition of their mosques. [1]

During the clashes between the Lebanese army and Fatah al-Islam in June 2007, Mufti Qabbani issued a statement condemning the “Absi group” (referring to Fatah al-Islam leader Shakir Yusuf al-Absi), warning them against using mosques as shelters and holding them responsible for any damage caused to the mosques as a result (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 14, 2007; see also *Terrorism Monitor*, March 26). A year later, the Mufti condemned Fatah al-Islam attacks on the Lebanese Forces in northern Lebanon (Ya Libnan, June 1, 2008). Salafi-Jihadi poet Abu al-Qa’qa’a al-Qurayshi, whose poems are widely circulated on jihadi web forums, even wrote a poem entitled “Advocating Fatsh al-Islam and Exposing those Midgets Who Hate It,” in which several lines were used to criticize and threaten Grand Mufti Qabbani. [2]

On the international level, it is worth noting that the plot was reported a few weeks after an al-Qaeda attempt to assassinate Saudi Prince Muhammad bin Nayif by suicide bomb, the same tactic that was to be used against the Grand Mufti of Lebanon (see *Terrorism Monitor*, September 17). This suggests that targeted assassinations of leading personalities in the Islamic world using suicide bombers could become the favored pattern of al-Qaeda and Salafi-Jihadi operations.

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Notes:

1. See the discussion at: <http://www.aljazeeraatalk.net/forum/showthread.php?t=90750>.

2. See: <http://alflojaweb.com/vb/showthread.php?p=73023>, June 5, 2007.

Bekkay Harrach: The Face of German Terror

By Raffaello Pantucci

Germany's federal elections passed without incident on September 27, though they took place against a backdrop of intense concern in the German security services about a growing number of increasingly pointed al-Qaeda videos threatening Germany over its military deployment in Afghanistan. These messages included a videotape from Osama bin Laden on September 25, entitled "To the Peoples of Europe." The video had English and German subtitles along with footage of German cities and monuments (Al-Fajr Media Center, September 25). The message appeared only two days before the German elections. Germany has 4,200 troops in northern Afghanistan, where they have come under more frequent attack in the last year as the Taliban insurgency spreads.

While the message from bin Laden is alarming, it appeared to only incidentally target Germany, without the terrorist leader naming it specifically. A more direct threat came from a series of videos released by Bekkay Harrach (a.k.a. Abu Talha al-Alamani), a Moroccan-born German citizen who has joined al-Qaeda in the Afghanistan-Pakistan frontier region.

Harrach specifically threatened Germany, telling Muslims to avoid places that are not "essential to daily life" in the post-election period, though he stated that the city of Kiel would remain safe (*Der Spiegel*, September 18). In the first video of this series, entitled "Security - A Shared Destiny," Harrach appears clean shaven in front of a red curtain wearing a suit and blue tie – a marked contrast to previous videos in which he appeared as a veiled and turbaned fighter. Two days after this threat, a second video surfaced online, entitled "O Allah, I Love You (1)," this time showing Harrach turbaned once again. Instead of threatening Germany in this

second message, Harrach extols the joys of jihad to his fellow countrymen while engaging in highly personal reflections on his relationship to Allah and jihad:

"I also want to take part in the jihad, be like a mujahid, live like a mujahid, love like a mujahid, and feel like a mujahid. However, my problem is that I am committing too many sins. Can I take part in the jihad despite all these sins, even if I do not manage to stay away from sins? Or do I have to first be free of sin?" (As-Sahab, September 20).

This was followed days later by a third German-language video, this time entitled "O Allah, I Love You (2)," which more pointedly threatened Germany once again (al-Fajr Media Center, September 24).

Bekkay Harrach's star has ascended rapidly in jihadist circles. A figure who was once relatively unknown outside security circles, he has rapidly moved to become the face of what might be called the German jihad – a catch-all term that best describes the active phenomenon of young German Muslims who choose to go to the Afghanistan/Pakistan region to train alongside either al-Qaeda or affiliated groups like the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) or the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The depth of the problem was reinforced by the tale of a group from Bonn (including six German citizens) who left Germany with their families to join the jihad in Waziristan. They were arrested on the border and allegedly beaten by Pakistani police (*Der Spiegel*, September 21). Reports indicate that they remain in detention there.

Harrach was born in Morocco to a family that moved to Germany in 1981 when he was 3 or 4 years old. Once in the country, he spent most of his time in Bonn, where he was apparently active in social circles around the King Fahd Academy, an alleged local hotbed of extremism (*Der Spiegel*, January 27). He attended a night-school in his 20s in Bonn, where he was studying to be an engineer. He ultimately elected to attend a university at the nearby Koblenz Institute for Technology, where he studied laser technology and business mathematics (*Bild*, April 22, 2009). However, his studies were regularly interrupted by trips abroad to seek glory in the fields of jihad, including a trip to the West Bank in 2003. Upon his return, blood was found on his belongings and it is believed he was injured in a skirmish with Israeli troops. He is also believed to have traveled twice to post-Saddam Iraq and may even have spent time in a Syrian jail (*Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, September 22).

While on return from one of these trips to Iraq (where he claimed he was on a “humanitarian mission”) he was stopped by Germany’s security services, who attempted to recruit him (*Der Spiegel*, January 27).

In 2004, he gave up on his studies and took on a role at the local Muhadshirin Mosque in Bonn where he preached in a lively and extreme fashion. Towards the end of 2006, Harrach was introduced to Aleem Nasir, a German-Pakistani “gemstone dealer” who was recently incarcerated for being an al-Qaeda facilitator. It is believed that the man who introduced them was Omer Ozdemir, a German of Turkish heritage who is currently on trial with another man on charges of belonging to al-Qaeda and helping procure funds and equipment for the group (*Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, September 14).

Nasir gave Harrach a formal letter providing him with an introduction to an al-Qaeda training camp before Harrach headed off to Waziristan through Iran in early 2007, leaving behind a pregnant wife. Once in Pakistan, he rapidly established himself as a bright light amongst the ranks of foreign fighters there, apparently being trained by master al-Qaeda bomb-maker Abu Ubaidah al-Masri and operating under the protection of the Haqqani network (*Der Spiegel*, January 27).

A clue to Harrach’s potentially important role can be found in a statement given to *Der Spiegel* by a Pashtun commander in the Haqqani Network, who claimed; “If we want to do something, we always ask the German for his opinion” (*Der Spiegel*, January 27). Harrach’s background as an engineer has apparently made him something of an expert in bomb-making.

However, it is likely Harrach’s role as a connection to the German-speaking world that has made him so important within the networks based in Pakistan. German is increasingly used in al-Qaeda or al-Qaeda-affiliate video releases – in particular those from the IMU and the IJU. The latter group was apparently behind the “Sauerland Cell” plot to attack American targets in Germany (see *Terrorism Focus*, January 28, 2009; November 8, 2007). Descriptions from those who knew him portrayed Harrach as a personable chap, recalled by acquaintances who knew him in Bonn as not bearing the outward appearance of an extremist yet capable of persuading his wife, a German convert to Islam, to leave the comfort of Bonn to join him with their young child in the less accommodating badlands of Waziristan (*Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, September 22; *Spiegel*, January 27).

Whatever his actual role in al-Qaeda, his messages to his adopted land have put German authorities on the highest alert. Armed police patrol major airports and rail stations and security forces detained two men “of Arabic origin” in Munich after a judge approved their preventive detention until the Bavarian city’s Oktoberfest beer festival is over. Increased security at the event led one German news source to say “Oktoberfest has been transformed from a beer festival into a beer fortress” (*Spiegel*, September 29). One of the men detained was in contact with Harrach, while the other apparently knew him through a relative (*Spiegel*, September 28). Police previously arrested a young Turkish man in Stuttgart for allegedly posting one of Harrach’s videos online (*Hurriyet*, September 25).

It is the specificity of the threat that has alarmed watchers. While earlier official alerts have been sent out to German companies operating abroad (especially in North Africa), the focus on Germany and the specific timeline hinted in this new set of videos has officials particularly alarmed. The numbers being leaked to the press are equally disturbing - German officials say they are concerned about some 180 individuals who “have received or intend to receive paramilitary training.” About 80 of these individuals have returned to Germany but only 15 are in custody (*Spiegel*, September 28). Whether Harrach is able to draw from this pool to live up to his threat of giving Germany a “rude awakening” seems unclear, but it is certain that he was able to force the issue of Germany’s military role in Afghanistan onto the political agenda.

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Are China’s Uyghurs Operating an al-Qaeda network in Turkey? Ankara and Beijing Discuss Cooperation against Terrorism

By Emrullah Ushu

Turkish State Minister Zafer Caglayan paid an official visit to China and met Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao as a special envoy of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan on

August 31. Caglayan is the first Turkish minister to visit China after July's Uyghur unrest in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, in which 197 people died according to the official tally. "We want to strengthen and improve bilateral relations with the principle of mutual respect, equality and interest," Wen Jiabao said (Anadolu Ajansi, August 31).

Turks and the Muslim Uyghurs of China's western province of Xinjiang have a common origin in Central Asia and speak related Turkic languages. In addition to a common Turkic origin and language, Turkey has been seeking large numbers of Uyghur migrants since 1949, when East Turkistan was seized by China. Approximately 80,000 Uyghurs live in Turkey, however their impact on forming public opinion is much greater than their numbers suggest because of the common ties between the two peoples.

Connecting Uyghur Separatism to the War on Terror

The East Turkistan Liberation Organization (Dogu Turkistan Kurtulus Orgutu – DTKO) and East Turkistan Islamic Movement (Dogu Turkistan slam Hareketi - DTIH) are two extremist organizations that may have limited activity in Turkey, though the latter appears to be largely inactive since the death of its leader, Hasan Mahsum, at the hands of Pakistani security forces in 2003. In 1998 and 1999, two attacks against Chinese citizens in Istanbul were claimed by the DTKO (Referans, July 11).

Since 9/11, China has found a suitable international climate in which to connect the Uyghur resistance to the global war on terror. In July, China's official Xinhua news agency outlined what it described as the continuing relationship between "East Turkistan" separatism and international terrorism:

With explosions targeting civilians, assassinations, arson attacks, poisonings and al-Qaeda style video footages threatening dire actions, the "East Turkistan" separatists have long been terrorists... The "East Turkistan" forces, under the influence of terrorism, extremism and separatism, pose a severe threat not only to China, but also to the Asian-Pacific region and the world at large... The "East Turkistan" forces play a major role in world terrorism" (Xinhua, July 23).

In April, China executed two Uyghur men in Kashgar for what it called a "terrorist" attack on August 4, 2008 aimed at sabotaging the Olympics that left 17 policemen dead (Guardian, April 9). While the men wrote a letter before the attack saying they intended to wage "holy war" against the communist regime, no link to al-Qaeda was established. Two weeks before Turkish president Abdullah Gul visited China on June 24, local party secretary Zhang Jian claimed that Chinese authorities had uncovered seven terrorist cells in the East Turkestan city of Kashgar (*China Daily*, June 3). Kashgar is the administrative center of Xinjiang's Kashgar prefecture and the cultural center of the Uyghurs, some of whom have raised a banner of revolt against Chinese rule. According to Zhang, the whole region faces an "ongoing threat" from terrorists who control local operatives from abroad by using the internet. The party secretary added that the border city of Kashgar has long been a launching ground for terrorists, with 350 attacks resulting in 60 deaths of government officials and civilians since the 1990s (Indianexpress.com, June 3).

In response, Rebiya Kadeer, the Washington-based leader of the World Uyghur Congress, said China made the allegations "without producing the slightest piece of evidence... I stress that the international community should view these claims with the utmost skepticism." Kadeer, who spent six years in prison in China, added, "These allegations are being made in such a way so as to associate peaceful Uyghurs with the scourge of terrorism" (AFP, June 3).

The Chinese press reported that August raids by the Chinese security forces uncovered a bomb-making operation in southern Xinjiang, foiling alleged plans to carry out attacks including suicide bombings (*China Daily*, September 17). Six suspects were arrested and large amounts of bomb-making materials were seized in the raids, according to a notice posted on the Public Security Ministry website. Police claimed to have found 20 fully assembled explosive devices and three bomb making workshops set up on the outskirts of the city of Aksu, about 700 kilometers southwest of Urumqi. According to Chinese officials, two Uyghur men named Seyitamut Obul and Tasin Mehmud were arrested and accused of being the ringleaders of the terrorist operation. Allegedly the terrorists had planned to deliver bombs on cars, motorcycles, and employ people to "carry out terrorist sabotage activities," but were prevented from doing so by timely police action (*Shanghai Daily*, September 17).

The Uyghur Response

In response to these allegations, Uyghur community leaders in Turkey strongly rejected attempts to associate the Uyghurs with terrorism. Seyyit Tumturk, the deputy chairman of the World Uyghur Congress and one of the best known leaders of the Uyghur community in Turkey, rejected the Chinese claims, arguing that these are the same old Chinese tactics used to criminalize the Uyghurs in the eyes of the international community. However, according to Tumturk, the “World Uyghur Congress and its members around the world operate under international law and you could not even find a single member of Uyghur communities who has faced any investigations in the democratic world” (Author’s interview, September 18).

The Chinese Government argues that the Uyghur attacks are well-orchestrated around the world. For instance, the official Xinhua news agency reports, “Only hours after the riots started in Urumqi... groups of Uyghurs gathered at China’s foreign missions to throw stones, eggs and Molotov cocktails (china-embassy.org, July 12). Seyyit Tumturk stated that at the same time as the July 5 Urumqi riot, “Uyghurs were protesting the Chinese government at the Chinese Consulate in Istanbul.” Tumturk rejects the Chinese allegations of well-orchestrated attacks on Chinese foreign missions and describes the timing of the two events on the same day as a “coincidence.” (Author’s interview, September 18)

Due to the alleged presence of Uyghur militants in al-Qaeda networks, China attempts to relate all Uyghur demands and peaceful political activities to terrorism. In fact, after the riot in Urumqi, the Chinese embassy in Algiers warned Chinese citizens in Algeria of an al-Qaeda threat to Chinese workers in the nation after a London-based risk analysis firm claimed to have seen an al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) document threatening such attacks (AFP, July 15).

Legitimate or not, the threat highlights the risks faced by China as it expands its economic investments in risky territory overseas. The Uyghur American Association (UAA) and the World Uyghur Congress (WUC) issued a statement detailing both organizations’ absolute opposition to al-Qaeda and all forms of political violence (unpo.org, July 15). Despite their forceful condemnation of al-Qaeda, there is evidence that some Uyghurs operate within al-Qaeda’s networks. For instance, a Turkish

jihadi website broadcasts video footage of the “East Turkistan mujahideen” in training. [1]

Is the Uyghur Resistance a Threat to Turkey?

Generally, the Turkish security apparatus does not consider the Uyghur community as a security threat to Turkey’s interests. Yet, due to political and economic concerns, former Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz sent a confidential circular order in 1998 to the Turkish bureaucracy instructing it not to participate in any Uyghur activities and to prevent Chinese flag burning during protests at the Chinese embassy. In the order, the Turkish Prime Minister emphasizes that the Uyghur community’s activities create concerns surrounding Turkish-Chinese relations. “In order not to harm our growing relations with China, one of the five permanent members of the U.N., it should not be [prohibited] to carry signs that may hurt China and East Turkestan flags at the public protests against China” (*Vatan*, July 9).

As is seen in the order, Turkey’s position on the Uyghurs relates more to political and economic concerns than to terrorism or other security concerns. However, since 2003, the Turkish security apparatus has been very vigilant about al-Qaeda activities and their possible connections with recently migrated communities, i.e. the Chechens, Uyghurs, etc. Though security officials in the Turkish security bureaucracy do not have a tendency to tie the Uyghur communities to al-Qaeda activities, a security bureaucrat told Jamestown that “some of the recent immigrants who have spent some time in Afghanistan then migrated to Turkey have had contacts with [the] al-Qaeda organization in Afghanistan and maintain their relations with local al-Qaeda cells in Turkey. But this is an isolated issue and has nothing to do with Uyghur nationalist activities in Turkey” (Author’s interview, September 18).

Uyghur community leaders insist that Uyghurs have no relations with al-Qaeda or any other Islamic extremist groups. “It would be a grave mistake on behalf of Uyghur communities to join any terror organization” said Seyyit Tumturk (Author’s interview, September 18).

Answering allegations regarding the Uyghurs in Afghanistan and their connection to al-Qaeda’s network, Tumturk, underlines an interesting issue. “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) countries, including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, put pressure on Uyghur communities in

their countries and even deported some Uyghur activists to China where they were executed. Afghanistan was the only country [in which] Uyghurs could safely live for a temporary period. During their stay, al-Qaeda may have recruited from Uyghurs as well but it is nothing to do with the greater Uyghur communities around the world” (Author’s interview, September 18).

China’s View of Uyghur Diaspora Organizations in Turkey

It seems that Zafer Caglayan’s visit to Beijing may produce better relations between Turkey and China and establish cooperation in the security field. Within Turkey, the Turkish War College is one of the first government institutions to begin teaching the Chinese language (kho.edu.tr, September 10). During Caglayan’s visit, Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi underlined that his government is ready to begin cooperating with Turkey in combating terrorism to better fulfill the common task of safeguarding national unification and territorial integrity and opposing separatism. Given the fact that both China and Turkey face a separatist threat, the Chinese Foreign Minister sees discussions with Turkey as an opportunity to develop the common tasks of protecting national unification and territorial integrity. The two countries have enjoyed a long-standing coordination in security fields, including anti-terrorism (Chinaview.cn, August 30).

In addition, the Chinese embassy in Ankara emphasized the following points in response to an inquiry by Jamestown:

- The Kayseri-based Eastern Turkistan Culture and Solidarity Association, whose main purpose is to promote the independence of Xinjiang and separation of China, cannot represent the political will of all the Uyghurs living in Turkey. There are also many Uyghur organizations in Turkey which support the unity of China and would like to see the sound development of a bilateral relationship between China and Turkey.
- Seyyit Tumturk is the chairman of the Eastern Turkistan Culture and Solidarity Association and also the deputy chairman of the World Uyghur Congress. The fact is that the World Uyghur Congress incited the Urumqi incident and their purpose is to incite the conflict and hatred between the Han Chinese and Uyghur

nationalities. Any democratic country which is ruled by law will treat the incident as a serious crime against the law.

- After the incident, Tumturk and some Eastern Turkistan organizations misled the Turkish media and people by distorting facts and telling lies, and they pushed the Turkish Government and people to take a position in opposition to China. They intended to realize their goal by sacrificing the development of the bilateral relationship between the two countries.

- China and Turkey are facing a common challenge in confronting national separatism and maintaining national unity. The two countries have cooperated on anti-terrorism, especially during the time of the Beijing Olympic Games. The Chinese side would not like to see the Urumqi incident create a negative affect on this cooperative relationship and firmly believe that the Turkish Government will fulfill its international obligations on anti-terrorism. Beijing is glad to see that the Turkish side maintains a healthy and stable bilateral relationship with China—one that is in line with the national interests of Turkey as well as one that will preclude anyone from carrying out actions on Turkish territory aimed at separating China (Author’s interview with Chinese officials, September 18).

It is still too early to predict whether China and Turkey could actually cooperate on terrorism and security issues. Turkish public opinion about China’s attitude towards the Turkic Uyghurs of the Xinjiang region is not very positive and that could have a strong impact on the pragmatic Turkish government.

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Notes:

1. http://www.sehadetzamani.com/haber_detay.php?haber_id=2188, accessed September 18.

Death from the Skies: An Overview of the CIA's Drone Campaign in Pakistan – Part Two

By Brian Glyn Williams

For all their tactical success, American drone strikes on terrorist targets in northwest Pakistan have taken a significant toll on U.S. public relations efforts in the region. Despite their popularity amongst counterterrorism officials in the United States, polls show that 82% of Pakistanis find the drone missile strikes to be unjustified. [1] Figures given by Pakistani officials show that 687 civilians have been killed along with 14 al-Qaeda leaders in drone strikes between January 14, 2006 and April 8, 2009 (*The News* [Islamabad], September 20). This would mean there were over 50 civilians killed for every one al-Qaeda target. There can be no doubt that the killings, especially of innocent Pakistani women and children, have caused tremendous outrage amongst average Pakistanis who are already pre-disposed to anti-Americanism. The discontent has spread from the Pashtun tribal belt to such provinces as Punjab and Sindh, the heartland of Pakistan. This has undermined the Pakistani military's own campaign against the Taliban by painting it as one that is driven by U.S. interests.

Fully aware of the unpopularity of the strikes, the Pakistani government has sought to distance itself from them. This has taken the form of a flow of public statements criticizing the attacks and a scolding of the U.S. ambassador on two occasions. Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani said recently, "As far as drone attacks are concerned, the entire world has the same stand as Pakistan has - that drone attacks are counter-productive... If the drone attacks had been useful, then we would have supported them ourselves... Our policy is to isolate militants from the local tribes, but drone attacks unite them" (AFP, May 23).

The spokesman for Pakistan's Inter-Services Public Relations, Major-General Athar Abbas, claims the missile strikes "hurt the campaign [against terrorism] rather than help" (*Christian Science Monitor*, July 8). Abdul Basit, a Pakistan foreign office spokesman, also expressed his opposition to the strikes. "As we have been saying all along, we believe such attacks are counter-productive. They involve collateral damage and they

are not helpful in our efforts to win hearts and minds" (*Pakistan Observer*, March 19).

And it is that last concern that is most important to the Pakistanis. The fear is that collateral damage in the form of dead civilians could lead to a public relations windfall for the Taliban and al-Qaeda. This could drive Pashtun tribes that are on the fence to declare *badal* (revenge) against the U.S. or Pakistani governments. The resulting alienation from the deaths of a few Taliban and al-Qaeda leaders could drive tens of thousands of armed tribesmen into militancy.

These fears may not be misplaced. There have been numerous protest marches against the strikes and several retaliatory suicide bombings by the Taliban or enraged Pashtun tribesmen. Retired Pakistani General Mirza Aslam Baig even tied the 2009 bombing of Islamabad's Marriot Hotel to American drone operations. "The CIA has been using our bases for drone attacks and the operational command of drone attacks is operating from Tarbella, near Islamabad. The Marriot Hotel was being used as an operational command headquarters by the CIA. After its destruction, the command was shifted to Tarbella" (IslamOnline, February 18).

The U.S. strikes have also driven Pakistani Taliban factions that had previously agreed to peace treaties with the Pakistani government (most notably those of Mullah Nazir and Hafiz Gul Bahadur) to break their truces and attack Pakistani troops. Both Nazir and Bahadur have been involved in attacks on U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

Bahadur's spokesman claimed, "The Pakistani government is clearly involved in these attacks by American spy planes so we will target government interests as well as foreigners" (Inter Press Service, June 12). While Bahadur could not prove it at the time, his spokesman's charges of collaboration between the Pakistani military and the CIA would soon be vindicated.

Collusion between the CIA and the Pakistani Government

Bahadur's belief that the Pakistani government, for all its public statements of outrage, was somehow complicit in the strikes is not uncommon in the country. Pakistani officials dismissed such charges as "absurd" until Senator Diane Feinstein, Chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, dropped a bombshell in a February 12, 2009 conference when she claimed, "As I understand it,

these [drones] are flown out of a Pakistani base” (Dawn [Karachi], February 14). Feinstein’s comments were widely reported in Pakistan and caused considerable uproar. Five days later, the Times of London published an article that featured satellite images obtained from Google Earth that depicted Predator drones on a runway in Shamsi, an airbase in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan (*Times*, February 17).

Taken together, the *Times* article and Feinstein’s statements exposed the Pakistani government’s double game of officially rejecting the strikes while quietly providing logistical support to the CIA. Clearly some elements in the Musharraf and Zardari governments, the military and perhaps even the Inter-Services Intelligence were supporting the drone strikes. Senator Carl Levin, Chairman of the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, told a Senate Homeland Security committee in July that Pakistan’s policy of tacit approval and public condemnation of the drone strikes was a serious impediment to the conduct of the counterterrorist campaign in Pakistan. “For them to look the other way or to give us the green light privately and then to attack us publicly leaves us, it seems to me, at a very severe disadvantage and loss with the Pakistani people” (*Dawn*, July 10).

As it transpires, they were not the only ones. In a strange twist that seemed to fly in the face of the common belief that the Pashtun tribes in the FATA were being driven into the hands of the Taliban by the strikes, a Pakistani think tank carried out an opinion poll in the region that seemed to prove just the opposite. In the spring of 2009 the Aryana Institute for Regional Research and Advocacy interviewed hundreds of Pashtuns in FATA and found that 52% of them considered the air strikes to be accurate, 58% of them did not believe that the strikes caused anti-Americanism, 60% of them felt that the strikes damaged the militants, and 70% of them felt that the Pakistani army should also target the militants. [2]

The results of the poll, the first of its kind carried out in the region that has born the brunt of the strikes, would seem to indicate that many Pashtun tribesmen welcomed the strikes even if the rest of their countrymen did not. According to Pashtun journalist Farhat Taj:

Hatred against the Taliban in the Pakhtun [Pashtun] areas is at an all-time high and so is disappointment, even resentment, about the Pakistani army for its failure to stop the Taliban.

Many people in the Taliban-occupied territories of the NWFP and FATA told me they constantly pray for the U.S. drones to bomb the Taliban headquarters in their areas since the Pakistani army is unwilling to do so. Many people of Waziristan told me they are satisfied with the U.S. drone attacks on militants in Waziristan and they want the Americans to keep it up [until] all the militants, local Pakhtun [Pashtun], the Punjabis and the foreigners, are eliminated (*The News*, January 23).

It is perhaps this sort of Pashtun sentiment, and a growing realization among all Pakistanis that the creeping Taliban movement represents a threat to their state (especially since the Taliban’s bold seizure of Swat Province which lies close the capital), that has driven the Pakistani government to openly acknowledge that the unmanned planes were being launched from Pakistan in May 2009 (ThaiIndian News, May 13). This support seems to have increased since the coming to power of the new government of Asif Zardari. The United States has, for example, been sharing images from its Predators and using them as spy platforms to help the Pakistani military arrest Taliban figures. While the United States has turned down Pakistan’s request to let them fly the Predators themselves for security reasons, it is believed that Islamabad has had input on the target selection.

As the United States and Pakistan increase their cooperation on the drone attacks, the Pakistani public seems to have grown more tolerant of them. Tellingly, there was no outcry when Baitullah Mahsud, the Pakistani Taliban leader responsible for dozens of suicide bombings that killed average Pakistanis, was killed in an August 2009 drone strike.

It is also telling that the Pakistanis themselves have begun to use drones, such as the Italian-made unarmed Selex Galileo Falco, to carry out surveillance in their campaigns against the Taliban (*Jane’s Defence Weekly*, May 13). The Pakistanis have also been producing their own drones, including the Burraq, Bazz, Ababeel, and Uqaab models. The latter is reportedly being upgraded with Chinese weapons to enable it to be used as a strike drone (*Dawn*, April 24). Pakistan, which has not been given Predators of its own by the United States, has also been working with the Turkish company Roketsan to arm their drones with laser-guided anti-tank missiles (Rupee News, April 20, 2008). Clearly for all their public remonstrations with the Bush and Obama administrations, the Pakistanis would like to have killer

drones of their own to use against the militants who have wreaked havoc in their country.

Meanwhile the strikes continue at a faster pace this year than last year and, if the current tempo continues, 2009 will see 20% more strikes than 2008. Clearly the Obama administration, which has rejected so many of the Bush administration's tactics in the "War on Terror," has, with Islamabad's connivance, settled on drone strikes as its best option in the campaign against al-Qaeda and the Taliban. With the Taliban posing an ever greater threat to the Pakistani state and people, the earlier Pakistani outrage over the strikes seems to be dissipating as the Pashtuns and even those in other provinces come to see the drone strikes as a necessary evil.

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Notes:

1. "Pakistani Public Turns Against Taliban, But Still Negative on U.S.," World Public Opinion.org, July 1, 2009.
2. "Drone Attacks - A Survey." The Aryana Institute for Regional Research and Advocacy, March 5, 2009, <http://www.airra.org/news/DroneAttacks.htm>.