

in the West is all the more important to their reputation because challenging the United States in the Middle East has failed so far, although al-Zawahiri boasts that al-Qa`ida has won in every conflict. The al-Qa`ida challenge to Saudi Arabia also collapsed, and Egypt is a lost cause. The outcomes of the conflicts in Yemen and Somalia remain to be determined.

Decentralization is also a practical response to pressure. Following the logic that most terrorism is local, instigating local cells to attack the enemy at home is the most effective way of reaching Western territory. Mounting an attack from abroad is logistically difficult. Al-Suri explicitly acknowledged that dispersion into small units is the most effective way of maintaining the organization and continuing the struggle in the face of the effectiveness of post-9/11 counterterrorism.

It is instructive to look at al-Qa`ida's and its sympathizers' reactions to President Barack Obama's speech in Cairo in June 2009 calling for a new beginning as expressed in online forums. In general, the initiative was interpreted as a threat. Al-Zawahiri was scornful of Muslims who were deceived into welcoming a dialogue or partnership with the West. Al-Zawahiri appealed to nationalism in both Egypt and Pakistan (interestingly, speaking in English to a Pakistani audience and referring frequently to the honor of the military). Jihadist online circles also seemed alarmed by Muslims' positive reception of the Obama message. One theme of jihadist discourse is that Obama's deceptive "sweet-talk" and cajoling cannot be permitted to weaken Muslim hatred for the United States. Another is that U.S. policy will not change—the new approach renouncing the war on terrorism is mere rhetoric, and the United States will continue to kill Muslims and support Israel. These views will be reinforced by the new strategy in Afghanistan; no matter how careful U.S. forces try to be, civilian casualties are inevitable.

A common view in these discussions is that jihadists must act because of the cowardice of leaders in Muslim countries (Egypt and Saudi Arabia in particular), including the *ulama* or clergy. Online comments also remind audiences that

there has not been a successful attack against a target in the West since 2005. Criticism of their passivity presents a challenge for al-Qa`ida loyalists.

Is there Muslim opposition to the al-Qa`ida worldview? Some prominent Muslim clerics have taken a strong stand against al-Qa`ida's doctrine (particularly in Saudi Arabia and Egypt), but their critiques are unlikely to moderate the views of major al-Qa`ida leaders. Delegitimizing the jihadist message might discourage potential recruits who have not yet moved to violence, but it is almost impossible to know. Al-Qa`ida and the Taliban typically deflect internal criticism of bomb attacks that kill Muslim civilians by evoking conspiracy theories: the true perpetrators are invariably the Central Intelligence Agency, the Mossad, Pakistani intelligence, or other shadowy agents of the enemy.

#### Conclusion

Al-Qa`ida is declining, but it is still a dangerous organization. It is not a mass popular movement, but rather a complex, transnational, and multilayered organization with both clandestine and above-ground elements. It has proved durable and persistent. The determination of its leaders to attack the United States is undiminished and might strengthen as the organization is threatened, but another attack on the scale of 9/11 is unlikely.

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## The Pakistan Military's Adaptation to Counterinsurgency in 2009

By Sameer Lalwani

FACED WITH A rising and emboldened insurgency in its tribal belt, Pakistan's military has come under fire in recent years for failure to adapt its military doctrine, which is based around conventional warfare, to tackle the internal threats of insurgency and terrorism.<sup>1</sup> Not adapting to unconventional warfare has been used to explain Pakistan's failures to quell insurgency in the tribal areas, high civilian and soldier casualties, rising levels of resentment and militancy, three major operational failures in South Waziristan, and its overall poor battlefield performance.<sup>2</sup> Underscoring this concern is the mounting evidence of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan's (TTP) rapid learning and adaptation that poses a serious threat to the state of Pakistan.<sup>3</sup>

The Pakistan military's failure has been attributed to a number of poor tactical choices since 2002, including: 1) excessive focus on enemy targeting and "high-value targets"; 2) overdependence on large-scale multi-unit forces (mostly brigade level) rather than smaller units dispersed among the population; 3) frequent deployment of forces to static garrisons or defensive positions inhibiting proactive actions; 4) inadequate resources for flexible responses to contingencies such as quick reaction forces; 5) over-reliance on kinetic "direct-action" operations and heavy firepower; and finally 6) an

1 This critique has been advanced by a number of prominent security analysts and includes: David Kilcullen, "Terrain, Tribes, and Terrorists: Pakistan, 2006-2008," Brookings Counterinsurgency and Pakistan Paper Series, No. 3, September 10, 2009; Ahmed Rashid, "Pakistan's Continued Failure to Adopt a Counterinsurgency Strategy," *CTC Sentinel* 2:3 (2009); Seth G. Jones, "Pakistan's Dangerous Game," *Survival* 49:1 (2007).

2 One anonymous Western analyst quoted by the *Economist* estimated that Pakistan had lost 70% of its battles with the Taliban. See "Pakistan and the Taliban: A Real Offensive or a Phony War?" *Economist*, April 30, 2009.

3 Some examples of analysts underscoring the role of adaptation by both insurgent and counterinsurgent parties includes Ejaz Haider, "Agency to GHQ," *Indian Express*, October 13, 2009; Shaukat Qadir, "The Taliban Diaries," *Daily Times*, June 20, 2009.

underuse of local forces' capacity and knowledge.<sup>4</sup> These choices generally defy counterinsurgency doctrine—now ascendant in U.S. and Western political discourse—which calls for political over military solutions, population security over enemy targeting, ground forces over airpower, and small rather than large force deployments for missions (such as patrols, intelligence gathering, and development assistance). In essence, these practices expose troops to greater vulnerability to achieve more discriminatory use of force.<sup>5</sup>

While the characterization of Pakistan's doctrinal focus on conventional warfare is correct—an unsurprising feature given the country's high external threat environment<sup>6</sup>—and unlikely to change, the past year has witnessed substantial improvement in the conduct

**“Rather than replicating the mistakes of past assaults that had simply displaced the Taliban to neighboring districts, the military combined assets from the army and air force in joint operations to ‘corner, choke, contain.’”**

and outcomes of Pakistani military operations. The sustainability of recent gains remains contingent on future political choices, civilian capacity, and successive operational phases. This article, however, contends that the Pakistan military's efforts in Bajaur Agency, the Swat Valley, and South Waziristan Agency have already showcased a diligent institutional learning process that has produced significant tactical adaptations yielding increasing tactical success.

4 Kilcullen.

5 Stephen Biddle, “The New U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual as Political Science and Political Praxis,” *Perspectives on Politics* 6:2 (2008).

6 Sameer Lalwani, *Pakistani Capabilities for a Counterinsurgency Campaign: A Net Assessment* (Washington, D.C.: New America Foundation, 2009).

**Bajaur: Operation Sherdil (Lion Heart)**

After a series of tactical and strategic disasters in the tribal areas,<sup>7</sup> the military achieved a reversal in fortunes through tactical shifts in Bajaur Agency. The objective of Operation Sherdil, which occurred from August 2008 through February 2009, was more ambitious than previous punitive efforts, seeking to target and dismantle the nerve center of the TTP's northern operations. General Tariq Khan, the former commander of the 14<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division who took command of the North-West Frontier Province Frontier Corps (FC), stated,

If we dismantle the training camps here, the headquarters, the communication centres, the roots which come in, stop the interagency movement and destroy the leadership...we feel that about 65 per cent or so of militancy [in the five northern Agencies] will have been controlled.<sup>8</sup>

After months of failed brute suppression and coercive assaults, the field reports of many junior officers led General Khan to shift tactics to a more population-centric approach by early 2009, making greater use of patrols, *lashkars* (militias), and tribal councils.<sup>9</sup> This within-operation adaptation that utilized battlefield reports and substantial junior officer input proved a unique “lessons learned” process and signaled a departure from

7 The Pakistani military exhibited a series of disastrous operations from 2004-2007 that resulted in cycles of offensives, defeats, and three sets of negotiations and concessions with the Taliban (in 2004, 2005 and 2006), providing the insurgency strength and legitimacy. This stemmed from underestimating the enemy, a firepower intensive approach, and overreliance on the Frontier Corps, which at the time was under-equipped and under-trained. The capstone of this humiliation was an ambush in which more than 200 Pakistani soldiers were captured without a fight. One Western analyst estimated that the military had lost 70% of its battles with the Taliban. For details on the ambush, see BBC News, October 9, 2007. For the battle estimate, see *Economist*, April 30, 2009. For more details on prior campaign failures, see Christine Fair and Seth G. Jones, “Pakistan's War Within,” *Survival* 51:6 (2009): p. 168.

8 Brian Cloughley, “Insurrection, Terrorism, and the Pakistan Army,” Pakistan Security Research Unit Brief, December 10, 2009, p. 17.

9 Haider Ali Hussein Mullick, “Helping Pakistan Defeat the Taliban: A Joint Action Agenda for the United States & Pakistan,” Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, August 2009, p. 19.

previous Pakistani military forays in the tribal region.

The patient, methodical clearing of the Taliban from Bajaur strayed from conventional operations and made significant use of new tactics and human intelligence.<sup>10</sup> Militants in Bajaur were deeply entrenched, requiring the military to move out the remaining villagers to utilize airpower and heavy artillery for combined arms maneuvers that drew militants out of their positions.<sup>11</sup> Airstrikes and artillery fire were quickly followed by ground forces that took advantage of suppressive fire to better target militants, and used mobile forces and helicopters for transport and intimate air support.<sup>12</sup> By the same token, the more discriminate use of force that reduced civilian casualties increased troop vulnerability resulting in higher Pakistani military casualties.<sup>13</sup> Despite criticisms of their capabilities and loyalties,<sup>14</sup> the FC evolved into a more competent and useful localized force spearheading the gradual erosion of insurgent power over many months along the central arterial roadways of the tribal agency.<sup>15</sup>

Only toward the conclusion of successful operations and the establishment of credible force in March 2009 did the military negotiate with the Mamood tribe to dismantle and surrender Taliban militants.<sup>16</sup> By negotiating from a position of strength and employing local forces to carry out demobilization, the military was able to establish a system of local security that neither appeased militants nor galvanized resistance to a military occupation.

Although militant activity in Bajaur Agency is reported to have flared up in November 2009, with an FC convoy

10 Personal interview, General (Ret.) Mahmud Durrani, former Pakistani ambassador to the United States, December 17, 2009.

11 *Witness: Pakistan's War: On the Front Line*, al-Jazeera, January 4, 2009.

12 Durrani.

13 Cloughley, p. 17.

14 Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, “No Sign Until the Burst of Fire: Understanding the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier,” *International Security* 32:4 (2008): p. 76.

15 *Witness: Pakistan's War: On the Front Line*.

16 Cloughley.

being ambushed,<sup>17</sup> this is due in large part to strained resources being utilized for the South Waziristan campaign that will test the enduring nature of tactical innovations.

#### **Swat Valley: Operation Rah-e-Rast (Path to Righteousness)**

Building on successes in Bajaur, the military turned its attention to a deteriorating situation in the Swat Valley and its surroundings from the end of April to mid-June 2009. Aside from properly resourcing the Swat operation with much higher levels of troops (roughly 52,000) along with intelligence and air assets,<sup>18</sup>

**“While the military has demonstrated its increasing proficiency in phase one ‘clear’ operations, the ‘hold’ phase will test Pakistani adaptive capabilities as well as the sustainability of its divide-and-rule approach as it seeks to rebuild dilapidated tribal structures to restore stability.”**

the distinguishing innovation of the operation was the deliberate mass evacuation of the population to better target insurgents and reduce collateral damage.<sup>19</sup> After clearing out militants, the military merged with some civilian efforts to shift to a more population-centric approach by working to resettle the internally displaced persons (IDPs), re-establish the writ of governance, and rebuild the local economy, although this process is ongoing and remains in the balance.<sup>20</sup>

Rather than replicating the mistakes of past assaults that had simply displaced the Taliban to neighboring districts,

the military combined assets from the army and air force in joint operations to “corner, choke, contain”—making greater efforts to block escape routes and drive the Taliban out of mountain hideouts.<sup>21</sup> Pakistan’s Special Service Group (SSG)—basically Pakistan’s special forces—was also deployed to secure areas for helicopter assaults north of Swat’s largest city, Mingora.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, rather than moving on to the next target after clearing areas, the military retained an enduring presence with small bases and detachments of troops to conduct local patrols, enforce curfews, and prevent TTP re-infiltration.<sup>23</sup>

In contrast to strategic assessments discounting Pakistani military innovation,<sup>24</sup> the Swat operation revealed a surprising degree of junior officer creativity on the battlefield including the combined use of human, signal, and imagery intelligence as well as conventional weaponry employed in unconventional ways.<sup>25</sup> More importantly, these lessons learned were quickly shared and disseminated to inculcate the practice of bottom-up innovation.<sup>26</sup>

Consolidating the military’s tactical success in Swat depends upon subsequent phases. The reincorporation of two million IDPs will prove challenging alongside maintaining security and rebuilding decaying economic and governance institutions that had allowed for Taliban takeover.<sup>27</sup> Further constraints will be posed by limited resources and systemic problems including historically poor civil-

military relations,<sup>28</sup> cycles of political instability,<sup>29</sup> and calcified, regressive economic institutions.<sup>30</sup>

#### **South Waziristan:**

##### **Operation Rah-e-Nijat (Path to Salvation)**

After suffering three humiliating defeats in South Waziristan since 2004, the military approached its latest operation in the agency better equipped and with an estimated 30,000-60,000 troops.<sup>31</sup> Although officially launched on October 17, 2009, preliminary efforts to shape the operation began as early as the spring of 2009, preparing the way for the ground assault. Intelligence assets embedded in the area enabled interception of TTP communications<sup>32</sup> and assisted with targeting TTP ground establishments for Pakistani airstrikes and the highly controversial U.S. drone attacks.<sup>33</sup> The military established a blockade around the target area for two months prior to the ground assault to cut-off movement and supply routes while airstrikes and shelling softened enemy targets.<sup>34</sup> After the military recognized the value of blocking forces in Bajaur and Swat, they were heavily emphasized and utilized during the South Waziristan assault,<sup>35</sup> although their efficacy has been disputed by outside assessments.<sup>36</sup>

28 Ayesha Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule: The Origins of Pakistan’s Political Economy of Defense* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Ayesha Siddiqi, *Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan’s Military Economy* (London: Pluto Press, 2007).

29 Paul Staniland, “The Poisoned Chalice: Military Culture, Contentious Politics, and Cycles of Regime Change in Pakistan,” MIT working paper, 2009.

30 Omar Noman, *Economic and Social Progress in Asia: Why Pakistan Did Not Become a Tiger* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); John R. Schmidt, “The Unraveling of Pakistan,” *Survival* 51:3 (2009).

31 This included at least two regular infantry divisions. See Rahimullah Yusufzai, “Assessing the Progress of Pakistan’s South Waziristan Offensive,” *CTC Sentinel* 2:12 (2009).

32 Bukhari.

33 Haider. For more on the drone strikes, see Jane Mayer, “The Predator War,” *New Yorker*, October 26, 2009.

34 Haider; Cloughley; Frederick Kagan, Reza Jan and Charlie Szrom, “The War in Waziristan: Operation Rah-e-Nijat - Phase 1 Analysis,” [www.criticalthreats.org](http://www.criticalthreats.org), November 18, 2009.

35 Personal interview, Shuja Nawaz, December 2009. Also see Durrani.

36 Imtiaz Ali, “Military Victory in South Waziristan or the Beginning of a Long War?” *Terrorism Monitor* 7:38 (2009). Also see Yusufzai.

17 Ibid.

18 Shuja Nawaz, “Pakistan’s Summer of Chaos,” *Foreign Policy*, June 18, 2009.

19 Durrani.

20 Ibid.

21 Mullick, p. 21.

22 “Pakistan Raids Taleban Stronghold,” BBC, May 12, 2009; Cloughley, p. 14.

23 Mullick, p. 21.

24 Daniel Byman, “Friends Like These,” *International Security* 31:2 (2006).

25 Mullick described how commanders bucked field manuals by using soldiers to help refugees escape before the use of heavy artillery, combining intelligence sources to improve targeting, and deploying tanks in urban areas to target snipers. See Mullick, p. 22.

26 Ibid.

27 Due to a severe economic crunch, reconstruction has not yet begun in Swat. See Syed Adnan Ali Shah Bukhari, “New Strategies in Pakistan’s Counter-Insurgency Operation in South Waziristan,” *Terrorism Monitor* 7:37 (2009).

During the operation, significant airpower was combined with rapid follow-on ground assaults.<sup>37</sup> For the first time, the Pakistani military purportedly received operational intelligence support from U.S. drones to assist with navigation and targeting in mountainous terrain.<sup>38</sup> Learning from the 2004 South Waziristan and the 2008 Bajaur operations, regular forces advanced from multiple axes and seized the high ground to encircle and control valleys. SSG forces were integrated into the operation to mop up insurgents as the army advanced and to secure the heights and key nodal points.<sup>39</sup> The military also responded to insurgent innovation and tactical diffusion from Afghanistan that had introduced anti-aircraft weapons and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to the Pakistani battlefield.<sup>40</sup> Precision-targeting by Pakistani jets was able to neutralize anti-aircraft weapons, which could disrupt close air support, and effective route clearance limited damage from IEDs.<sup>41</sup>

Politically innovative tactics also effectively shaped the environment prior to the operation. The first new tactic was narrowing the scope of the mission to target the Mehsud tribe while securing the neutrality of other powerful tribal groups led by Maulvi Nazir and Hafiz Gul Bahadur, whose participation in the insurgency had foiled previous regional operations.<sup>42</sup> Even after they renounced their neutrality when operations began, there seems to be little evidence that fighters from their tribes actually fought with the militants in the Mehsud camp or attacked Pakistani forces, suggesting this was more of a face-saving political gesture rather than a defection from their original agreement with the military.<sup>43</sup>

37 Bukhari. One analyst in close contact with Pakistani military headquarters estimated there were initially more than 140 targets slated for airstrikes.

38 Julian E. Barnes and Greg Miller, "U.S. Aiding Pakistani Military Offensive," *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 2009; Bukhari.

39 Haider; Frederick Kagan, Reza Jan and Charlie Szrom, "The War in Waziristan: Week 1 Analysis of Operation Rah-e-Nijat," [www.criticalthreats.org](http://www.criticalthreats.org), October 26, 2009.

40 Johnson and Mason, p. 67.

41 Kagan et al., October 26, 2009.

42 Durrani; Cloughley, p. 19.

43 Cloughley, p. 19.

Second, the military experimented with psychological operations, distributing leaflets supposedly from religious authorities and local tribes that warned youth of "false jihad" and blamed foreign militants for ushering destruction into the tribal areas.<sup>44</sup> Third, the military waited for a proximate cause—the insurgent assault on the army's headquarters in October—to rally popular support and ensure the operation was perceived as Pakistan's own offensive, not one at the behest of the United States.<sup>45</sup> The focus on conducting psychological and information operations, amassing popular support, and dividing insurgents to limit the scope of operations all factored into the moderately successful outcome.

While acknowledging the tactical success of the operation, former generals have publicly expressed skepticism over the sustainability of the Pakistan military's gains, predicting that dispersed militants will regroup and resume hit-and-run operations against the Pakistani Army within months<sup>46</sup> (a development that appears to have already begun<sup>47</sup>). The military's expected presence for three to four months in the region could become a target for resistance and attacks, but an early departure could quickly unravel the hard-fought gains.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, despite being dislodged from their strongholds, a number of factors—the escape of the TTP leadership, the relatively few numbers of militants killed (600 out of an estimated 10,000),

44 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

45 Ali.

46 Retired General Talat Masood is quoted as saying, "The militants have the capacity to regroup and come back...South Waziristan has been a tactical success of sorts, but by no means is it a victory." See Alex Rodriguez, "Pakistan Taliban Regrouping Outside Waziristan," *Los Angeles Times*, November 26, 2009. Retired General Javed Hussein is quoted as stating, "Three or four months from now, they (the Taliban) are going to bounce back. When the army is deployed to hold the area, the guerillas will start their hit-and-run attacks against the army's lines of communication, and all over the tribal area." See Saeed Shah, "Big Pakistan Offensive has Failed to Nab Any Taliban Leaders," *McClatchy Newspapers*, November 24, 2009.

47 Yusufzai.

48 Kagan et al. indicate that the military will continue to stay for a period of time, but Johnson and Mason predict fierce resistance by Pashtun tribal groups toward any centralizing efforts.

and the expansion of operations against soft targets beyond their conventional theater in recent months—all suggest that the Pakistani Taliban have not been dismantled but remain organizationally intact.<sup>49</sup>

### Conclusion

Leading Pakistani national security experts have themselves been divided over the pace of learning and adaptation within the military. While the military leadership has expressed confidence in its capacities and training facilities,<sup>50</sup> and analysts have praised the military's swift adaptation and remarkable learning curve under logistical independence,<sup>51</sup> others, such as former Chief Secretary of the NWFP Khalid Aziz and former Inspector General of the Frontier Corps Major-General Mohammad Alam Khattak, have expressed a significant need for Pakistan to adapt faster to the demands of counterinsurgency.<sup>52</sup>

A close examination of the 2009 operations in Bajaur, Swat, and South Waziristan testify to the Pakistan military's learning from previous tactical blunders of indiscriminate violence that produced tremendous collateral damage and only enflamed the insurgency.<sup>53</sup> The cost of innovation, however, has been high casualty rates and the creation of new challenges, particularly the hundreds of thousands of IDPs created in the 2009 operations. While the military has demonstrated its increasing proficiency in phase one "clear" operations, the "hold" phase will test Pakistani adaptive capabilities as well as the sustainability of its divide-and-rule approach as it seeks to rebuild dilapidated tribal structures to restore stability.<sup>54</sup> As this process moves from

49 Ali; Yusufzai. Based on off-the-record conversations, this appears to be corroborated by Pakistani military assessments as well.

50 This is evidenced by General Kayani's rejection of counterinsurgency training. See "Counter-Insurgency Training Facilities Developed: Kayani," *Daily Times*, May 17, 2009.

51 Mullick; Shaukat Qadir, "Guerilla Warfare," *Daily Times*, September 26, 2009.

52 Khalid Aziz, "Need for a Counterinsurgency Strategy," *The News International*, June 15, 2008. On Khattak, see Muhammad Khurshid Khan, "Analyzing Domestic Terrorism as a Threat to Pakistan's Security and the Policy Response," *IPRI Journal* 9:2 (2009): p. 61.

53 Johnson and Mason, p. 74.

54 Yusufzai. Durrani confirmed the military and stra-

tactical to strategic shifts, greater resistance will be encountered.

The Pakistan military's learning and adaptation has been characterized by many analysts inside and outside of Pakistan as a cumulative "learning by doing" process,<sup>55</sup> suggesting that there will be gradual adjustments over time within Pakistan's approach to counterinsurgency rather than a dramatic doctrinal shift<sup>56</sup> or wholesale adoption of Western militaries' "best practices" by way of U.S. Army Field Manual 3-24. This seemingly languid pace of Pakistani adaptation will continue to be the result of finite and overstretched resources,<sup>57</sup> the inherently difficult pace of organizational adaptation,<sup>58</sup> and the divergence of Pakistani strategic interests in the region from the United States and NATO.<sup>59</sup>

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tegic leadership was coming to terms with this insight, made by outside observers including Johnson and Mason, p. 73.

55 Durrani; Stephen P. Cohen and Shuja Nawaz, "Mastering Counterinsurgency: A Workshop Report," Brookings Counterinsurgency and Pakistan Paper Series, July 7, 2009.

56 Mullick argues this indicates a doctrinal shift (p. 23) but conversations with other analysts including Shuja Nawaz and Moeed Yusuf imply otherwise—that this is a more graduated adaptation and that doctrinal shift will not occur without a serious investment in retraining through the establishment of a staff college or local counterinsurgency training school.

57 Durrani; Lalwani.

58 Austin Long, "Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence: The U.S. Military and Counterinsurgency Doctrine, 1960-1970 and 2003-2006," RAND Counterinsurgency Study, No. 6, 2008.

59 Moeed Yusuf, "Rational Institutional Design, Perverse Incentives, and the US-Pakistan Partnership in post-9/11," *Defence Against Terrorism Review* 2:1 (2009).

## Karachi Becoming a Taliban Safe Haven?

By Imtiaz Ali

KARACHI IS THE backbone of Pakistan's economy and the country's largest city of 18 million people.<sup>1</sup> The city has a history of ethnic and sectarian violence, yet in the last few years it has managed to maintain relative peace. Since 2009, however, there has been an uptick in violent activity in Karachi, culminating with the December 28, 2009 bombing of a Shi'a Ashura religious procession that left more than 30 people dead.<sup>2</sup> The attack was not only followed by an unprecedented level of looting, but it plunged Karachi into a fresh wave of targeted killings.<sup>3</sup>

These developments are alarming because the destabilization of Karachi would have profound effects on Pakistan. Karachi houses Pakistan's central bank and its largest stock exchange, and generates 68% of the government's revenue and 25% of the country's gross domestic product.<sup>4</sup>

It is clear that fighters from multiple Taliban factions are increasingly moving to the city. Militants continue to flee U.S. drone strikes and Pakistani military operations in the country's northwest tribal regions. In fact, two months ago news reports speculated that Taliban supreme leader Mullah Omar himself shifted his base from Quetta to Karachi.<sup>5</sup> Between late

October and early November 2009, Karachi police arrested more than 450 illegal foreign residents, mostly Afghan and Uzbek citizens suspected of having ties to militants.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, 70 militants with access to suicide jackets, rocket launchers and other explosives were arrested in the closing months of 2009.<sup>7</sup>

This article will provide background on the city of Karachi, including how it is home to jihadist and sectarian groups, as well as explaining why Taliban fighters are increasingly moving to the city.

### Brief Demography of Karachi

Karachi is Pakistan's financial hub and its most populated city. It was the country's first capital after it achieved independence in 1947, until it was moved to Rawalpindi in 1958 and then Islamabad in 1960. Karachi is located in a strategic geographic position. It is on the shores of the Indian Ocean and is a major Pakistani port. It is a primary entryway for supplies to U.S. and NATO troops in neighboring Afghanistan. Its population has grown to more than 18 million, and it is home to several different ethnicities and religions.<sup>8</sup> Although 96% of the city is Muslim, it is estimated that 30% of that number ascribes to the minority Shi'a faith; this has resulted in sectarian violence over the years between minority Shi'a and majority Sunni Muslims.<sup>9</sup> Karachi is home to a sprawling network of *madrasas* (religious schools) and jihadist militant groups.

The city is home to the world's largest number of Pashtuns. In Karachi, the more than 3.5 million Pashtuns<sup>10</sup> are second only to the Urdu-speaking Muhajir,<sup>11</sup> who are the biggest ethnic

Karachi," *Newsweek*, November 28, 2009.

6 Farhan Sharif and Naween Mangi, "Karachi Police Hunt Terror Cells as Taliban Flee Army," Bloomberg, November 6, 2009.

7 Ibid.

8 Aziz and Birsell.

9 This is according to Pakistan's 1998 census. For details, see [www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu-projects/Global\\_Report/pdfs/Karachi.pdf](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu-projects/Global_Report/pdfs/Karachi.pdf).

10 "Editorial: Prospects of a 'Quick Finish' in Swat," *Daily Times*, May 13, 2009.

11 Muhajir, politically organized into the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), are the descendants of Urdu-speaking Indians who migrated from India after the creation of Pakistan in 1947. They are the biggest com-

1 Pamela Constable, "Bombing and Fire Disrupt a Fragile Peace in Karachi, Pakistan," *Washington Post*, January 4, 2010.

2 A faction of the Pakistani Taliban initially took credit for the attack, but the government blamed Lashkar-i-Jhangvi. See "Suicide Bombing in Karachi Kills 30," CBS News, December 28, 2009; "Taliban Claim Karachi Suicide Attack Responsibility," *The Nation*, December 30, 2009; Geo TV, December 28, 2009; Amir Wasim, "Malik Blames LJ for Karachi Ashura Blast," *Dawn*, January 15, 2010.

3 Salis bin Perwaiz, "Political Violence Continues on Fourth Day," *The News*, January 11, 2010.

4 Faisal Aziz and Robert Birsell, "Pakistan's Karachi the Taliban Revenue Engine - Mayor," Reuters, December 2, 2009.

5 "Mullah Omar in Karachi: Report," *The Nation*, November 20, 2009; Eli Lake, Sara A. Carter and Barbara Slavin, "Taliban Chief Hides in Karachi," *Washington Times*, November 20, 2009; Ron Moreau, "Sheltered in