Iran's Kurdish Threat: PJAK

By James Brandon

As Iran faces international pressure over its nuclear program, Tehran is growing increasingly concerned by the internal threat posed by a resurgent Kurdish national movement led by the Party for Freedom and Life in Kurdistan (PJAK). In 2005, according to the Iranian government, PJAK killed at least 120 Iranian soldiers in Iran. In 2006, PJAK may exceed this total. Already, it has launched dozens of attacks both from its camps in Iraqi Kurdistan and from its underground cells in Iran itself. In one of its latest attacks, PJAK troops killed four Iranian soldiers on May 27 in a clash near the town of Mako in Iranian Kurdistan, the PKK's Roj TV reported. PJAK, however, regards its military operations as merely complementing its wider effort to build a new Kurdish national identity among the four million Kurds who make up seven percent of Iran's population. PJAK has around 3,000 troops based in northern Iraq, but claims tens of thousands of activists working inside Iran to promote a Kurdish identity, democracy and women's rights [1].

As the confrontation between Iran and the West escalates, international attention has increasingly focused on Tehran's internal vulnerability. In particular, analysts point out that Iran's "imperial" past has resulted in ethnic Persians—who make up scarcely half of Iran's 80 million people—holding disproportinate power, wealth and influence. If the crisis with Iran escalates further, Iran's neglected and often resentful Kurdish, Azeri and Arab minorities may increasingly play a key role in global events. At the forefront will likely be Iran's Kurds, and chief among them PJAK, which for nearly a decade has worked to replace Iran's theocratic government with a federal and democratic system, respectful of human rights, sexual equality and freedom of expression.
History of PJAK

The exact history of PJAK is widely disputed. Turkey and Iran claim that PJAK is no more than an off-shoot of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). According to founding members of PJAK, however, the group began in Iran around 1997 as an entirely peaceful student-based human rights movement [2]. The group was inspired by the success of Iraq's Kurdish autonomous region and by the PKK's struggle in Turkey. Discouraged by the failure of previous Kurdish revolts, however, PJAK's leaders initially worked only to maintain and build a Kurdish national identity and to thwart the Iranian government's attempts to re-brand Iranian Kurds as ethnic Persians or Aryans.

After a series of government crackdowns against Kurdish activists and intellectuals, the group’s leadership moved to the safety of Iraqi Kurdistan in 1999. Here they settled in the area controlled by the PKK on the slopes of Mount Qandil—less than 10 miles from the Iranian border [3]. Once established at Qandil and operating under the PKK’s security umbrella, PJAK adopted many of the political ideas and military strategies of jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, whose theories had initially inspired PJAK’s founders while still in Iran. The PKK’s ideological influence also transformed PJAK from a civil rights movement to a more ambitious and multi-directional independence movement, aided by the transfer of many seasoned PKK fighters of Iranian origin into PJAK [4].

Ideology

Since then, PJAK has adopted many aspects of Abdullah Ocalan’s ideology, particularly his renunciation of his earlier communist ideologies in favor of democratic liberalism and his belief that civil activists need to be defended by military "cadres." Yet, PJAK retains many traces of its origins as a non-violent student movement. For instance, while the PKK considers Turkish civilians legitimate targets, PJAK operates "according to the rules of war," according to Akif Zagros, a member of PJAK’s seven member leadership council [5]. This claim has been reluctantly endorsed by the Iranian government; although it describes PJAK as a "terrorist group," it has never accused them of attacking civilians. While PJAK's leaders have twice kidnapped groups of Iranian soldiers in 2003 and 2004, in both instances they were released unharmed after being tried and acquitted for crimes against the Kurdish people by ad hoc PJAK courts in Iranian Kurdistan.

Equally, PJAK's vision is less radical than the PKK's. PJAK does not openly promote the creation of a single independent Kurdish state. Instead, they favor replacing Iran's velayat-e-faqih (rule by the jurisprudent) system of clerical government with a democratic and highly federalized system which would effectively grant self-rule not only to Kurds, but also to Azeri, Baloch and Arab regions. Privately, however, since PJAK itself is not exclusively composed of Iranian Kurds and contains Kurds from as far away as Russia, many PJAK members hope for the amalgamation of all Kurdish areas into a single fully independent Kurdish republic.

Yet, perhaps the most striking aspect of PJAK’s agenda is their call for the emancipation of women from Islamic law and Middle Eastern cultural norms. Ms. Gulistan Dugan, 36, head of Yerjerika, PJAK's women's branch founded two years ago, says that "45 percent of PJAK are women" and adds that "the daughters of our movement play a part in all our operations. There are many military operations that women have taken part in" [6]. PJAK sees women's freedom as a core part of a Kurdish identity and point to the relative equality enjoyed by Kurdish women historically. At the same time, the issue also usefully affirms their commitment to a modern, liberal and democratic government, while also underscoring their ideological, political and cultural opposition to Tehran.

Strategy

PJAK activists are inspired by Cold War socialist revolutions, Iran's own 1979 revolution and the experiences of Iraqi and Turkish Kurds. Akit Zagros describes the group's tactics as follows: "The first stage is to spread our ideas amongst the people, especially among women, students and businessmen. " He continues, saying that the "second stage is to organize people underground in schools, universities and in civil society" [7].

As the movement developed, however, the Iranian government reacted with increasingly heavy-handed crackdowns. In response, according to Zagros, "we formed a military force to protect ourselves and protect our movement. The rule of our party is to avenge the blood of our martyrs" [8]. The group's first armed attack took place in 2004 in the Meriwan region of Iranian Kurdistan after Iranian security forces fired on a Kurdish demonstration killing 10 people. This, however, did not mark an overall change of strategy toward military confrontation.
Military Operations

Although PJAK regularly engages Iranian troops, the group's attacks are not intended to defeat Iran militarily, but instead to complement and protect PJAK's political activists. In addition, the attacks aim to reinforce Kurdish national pride and to explicitly avenge the death of Kurdish activists and civilians. Ideally, PJAK would like to be strong enough to deter any crackdown against Kurdish civil activists by the Iranian authorities.

PJAK has adopted hit-and-run assault tactics against Iranian forces, carrying them out with "small arms and grenades," according to Zagros. Afterward, PJAK fighters may either melt back into Iranian society or re-cross the border into Iraqi Kurdistan. PJAK is believed to have some heavier weaponry in its Mount Qandil camp such as RPGs and heavy machine-guns [9]. PJAK's military operations are believed to be funded by Kurdish immigrant communities in Europe and Kurdish businessmen in Iran. Despite Iranian accusations, there is no evidence of any foreign funding.

Escalation

During early 2006, a cycle of Kurdish demonstrations, Iranian repression and Kurdish counterattacks developed in Iranian Kurdistan. This peaked in February when 10 Kurdish demonstrators were killed by police in the city of Maku. PJAK responded with "three attacks against two [Iranian] bases," says Zagros [10]. Shortly afterward, on April 21, and again a week later, Iranian troops fired nearly 100 artillery shells at PJAK positions near Mount Qandil and briefly crossed the Iraqi border, according to the Iraqi Ministry of Defense. "In the second violation, there was bombing against the positions of the PKK," Major-General Abd al-Aziz Muhammad, director of the joint operation center in the Iraqi Ministry of Defense told al-Jazeera, incorrectly assuming that PKK and not PJAK bases had been attacked. "The Iranian troops reached five kilometers into Iraqi territory before they withdrew" (al-Jazeera, May 3).

The Iranian attack is believed to have killed no more than 10 PJAK fighters, but it sent out a clear message that PJAK's camp was not invulnerable. The U.S. and Kurdish governments barely responded. "If those reports are true, I would expect that the Iranian government would have something to say to the Iranian government," U.S. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack told a May 1 press conference when asked about the raid.

PJAK and the PKK

One reason for the failure of the U.S., Iraqi or even the Kurdish governments to take action against Iran's April border incursion is the close relationship between PJAK and the PKK. The European Union and the United States officially classify the PKK as a "terrorist organization." Both Iraqis and Kurds believe the PKK presence in northern Iraq damages ties with Turkey, Iraq's best armed and most economically advanced neighbor.

Although PJAK is administratively, military and politically separate from the PKK, strong links remain. PJAK uses some PKK facilities—such as hospitals—and remain based inside the PKK's defensive perimeter on Mount Qandil. Additionally, the two groups evidently share common goals [11]. Of course, if PJAK's links with the PKK damages its standing in the West, the close relationship has other advantages. As well as benefiting from the PKK's military expertise, a close relationship also wins PJAK instant respect among the region's Kurds. Nevertheless, PJAK's complete failure to engage with Western governments or media means that Iran has successfully sown confusion by referring to PJAK attacks as being carried out by the PKK.

Conclusion

PJAK has taken a long-term approach. Its core strategy is to promote Kurdish identity and to fight only in order to defend and avenge its civil activists. PJAK's leaders believe that if they can prevent Kurds from losing their ethnic and historic identity, then there will someday be a chance for Kurds to break free from Tehran's rule. Today, however, PJAK's followers believe that a historic opportunity is fast approaching. They point out that civil and insurgent Kurdish groups in Turkey are again vibrant and that Turkey's response is constrained by its ambitions to join the European Union. At the same time, Iraqi Kurds have consolidated their position while anti-Kurdish governments in Iran and Syria are under increasing international scrutiny and pressure. In addition, Kurds, including PJAK, after re-branding themselves as opponents of political Islam and partisans of human rights, women's rights and democracy, are well-positioned to ride out coming geopolitical shifts in the Middle East and any fragmentation of Middle Eastern states.

PJAK's independent and non-state sources of funding and well-established underground network means that Iran will struggle to defeat either PJAK or the Kurdish
nationalism it fosters. Yet, given Iran's proven ability to absorb massive casualties, PJAK's ambitions to create a military balance of power and deter future Iranian crackdowns on PJAK activists seem optimistic. In addition, Iran recently adopted the successful Turkish system of employing rural Kurds as "village guards" in an attempt to force PJAK into fighting its own people. Since most PJAK attacks occur in cities, however, this tactic may fail, especially if Iran does not address wider Kurdish grievances through either investment or political reforms.

While PJAK lacks Western support, this has made the group self-reliant, flexible and open to compromise. For instance, PJAK currently talks mainly of reforming Iran's political system and aims to "create a coalition of all democratic and Kurdish parties," according to Zagros. If PJAK can succeed in creating a broader movement, then they might reach a position to challenge Tehran. In particular, PJAK regards Iran's 20 million Azeris as natural allies against Tehran, despite the fact that many Azeris hold key posts in the Islamic regime. In recent weeks, this strategy has become more plausible after the Azeris of Eastern Iran held widespread demonstrations after a Persian cartoonist compared them to cockroaches—perhaps hinting at deeper underlying tensions within Iran. In the meantime, however, as long as Iranian Kurds continue to consider themselves Kurds, rather than Persians or Iranians, then PJAK will consider itself successful.

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Notes

1. Akif Zagros, member of PJAK leadership council, interview with author, PJAK Camp, Mount Qandil, Iraqi Kurdistan, March 21.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
11. Assad Abdul Rahman Chaderchi, member of PKK leadership council, interview with author, PKK base camp, Mount Qandil, Iraqi Kurdistan, March 22.

Al-Qaeda's Recruitment Operations in the Balkans

By Anes Alic

The recent arrest and pending trial in Bosnia of three young men believed to have been plotting terrorist attacks on Western targets in the capital of Sarajevo has sparked fears that al-Qaeda is recruiting "white Muslims" in the country. Bosnia's porous borders and weak law enforcement institutions, coupled with the presence of hundreds of Islamic fighters who arrived from Arab countries during the 1992-1995 war, make this small war-torn country an easy meeting point for al-Qaeda networks.

During the pre-trial hearing on May 3 of Bosnia's first-ever terrorism case, three men—Mirsad Bektasevic, Cesur Abulkadir and Bajro Ikanovic—pleaded not guilty to charges of plotting a terrorist attack either in Bosnia or elsewhere. Two others—Senad Husanovic and Amir Bajric—who were charged with possession of explosives and believed to be heading up the alleged network's logistics, also pleaded not guilty and were released on bail.

The five men, four of whom are teenagers, were arrested in October and December last year in the Sarajevo suburbs of Butmir and Hadzici. Bektasevic and Abdulkadir were arrested in late October in Butmir's apartment owned by Bektasevic's cousin. They also rented two apartments in Sarajevo center, an anonymous high-ranking Bosnian police source told The Jamestown Foundation. While Bektasevic is a Bosnian Muslim national with Swedish and Serbian citizenship, and Ikanovic is a Turkish national with Danish residency, the remaining suspects were all Bosnians.

On October 20, 2005, agents found some 30 kilograms
of explosives and dozens of guns in raids on three apartments used by the suspects. They also said that they found a suicide vest. Yet, the most significant piece of evidence discovered was a videotape showing the two men asking God for forgiveness for the sacrifice they were about to make. Two of the suspects—Bektasevic and Abdulkadir—were wearing face masks and had videotaped themselves making bombs, the police source said.

Nevertheless, the first months of the investigation failed to turn up enough concrete evidence that the alleged network was plotting a terrorist attack in Bosnia, so the local authorities turned to Scotland Yard and the FBI for forensic assistance. FBI forensic tests on the face masks determined that they had been worn by Bektasevic and Abdulkadir, while Scotland Yard confirmed that the voice on the videotape belonged to Bektasevic.

Faced with the new evidence, the two main suspects changed their original statements where they had denied plotting terrorist attacks, saying instead that they had intended to "warn" Bosnian and Western European authorities about Muslims suffering in Iraq and Afghanistan. They also said they were plotting to "warn" the Bosnian government to withdraw its soldiers from Iraq. Bosnia recently sent some 30 soldiers there as part of a de-mining unit, the source said. He also said the alleged network was most likely plotting an attack on the European Forces (EUFOR) base in Sarajevo, located just 100 meters from the house where the two main suspects were arrested.

The investigation, however, has extended well beyond Bosnia, indicating the possibility of a "white al-Qaeda" network operating from Western to Southeastern Europe. Bektasevic operated under the code name Maximus and kept in touch with a group of at least three men in Britain, all of whom were arrested by British police in early November. The British police have not revealed details on the arrests. Days after the Sarajevo arrests, police in Copenhagen detained seven men and one woman, most of them Danish converts to Islam, on suspicion that they were planning suicide bombings somewhere in Europe. Four of the suspects arrested in Denmark have been released due to lack of evidence against them, while the other three have been released on bail. Evidence linked those arrested in Denmark to those arrested in Sarajevo (Slobodna Bosna, April 22).

In the meantime, however, the trial in Bosnia has been postponed for at least three months while prosecutors and investigators attempt to collect more solid evidence against the five. Some experts say that the Bosnian authorities moved too quickly to arrest the five, preventing authorities from learning the intended target of the alleged terrorist plot and revealing the extent of a wider "white Muslim" network in Europe. Bosnian security agencies allegedly discussed the repercussions of making the arrests too soon, but chose to move to thwart a possible terrorist attack before it was too late (Vecernji List, April 26).

While there is largely agreement that al-Qaeda is attempting to recruit white Muslims in Bosnia, there is some disagreement on the extent of these efforts. EUFOR says that it has no evidence that Bosnia and Herzegovina or the Balkans represent a bigger terrorist threat than any other country in Europe (Fena.ba, April 26). "We cannot exclude the existence of the threat in any country and that goes for BiH as well," EUFOR Commander Gian Marco Chiarini said. "However, at this moment EUFOR has no data that would lead us to the conclusion that the threat of terrorism and terrorist attacks is larger in BiH than elsewhere" (Dnevni Avaz, April 25).

The U.S. State Department's 2005 report on terrorism, however, warned that while Bosnian authorities had been highly cooperative in the war on terrorism, Bosnia could be an attractive locale for terrorists because of its weak state comprised of semi-autonomous power centers. Additionally, while secular Bosnia is no friend to Islamic extremism, several hundred Arab mujahideen warriors who arrived in Bosnia to fight on the Bosnian Muslim side during the war are likely to be sympathetic to al-Qaeda. According to the Bosnian Foreign Ministry, it is believed that as many as 6,000 Arab volunteers arrived during the war. After the war, up to 400 of them acquired local citizenship, many of them marrying local women. They came from a variety of locations in the Middle East and North Africa, but largely from Saudi Arabia, Syria and Algeria.

Perhaps most significantly, the pending terrorism trial has ignited a fierce debate about these naturalized citizens, prompting fears of a backlash. Bosnia-Herzegovina security agencies are actively investigating individuals and groups, including Al Hussein Imad, also known as Abu Hamza, the informal leader of naturalized Bosnian citizens, who recently warned that revoking citizenship from these Arab fighters could result in protests, blockades and other forms of unrest (Radio B92, May 26).
Anonymous EUFOR sources told The Jamestown Foundation that Abu Hamza was believed to have recently formed an organization called "Ansarija" to provide legal assistance to former mujahideen threatened with deportation to their home countries. Abu Hamza told Bosnian FTV's 60 Minutes political talk show on April 18 that those being targeted for deportation could not be legally expelled as they faced charges in their countries of origin. The Syrian-born Abu Hamza is among those who are facing deportation. He arrived in Bosnia in the early 1990s as a student. Investigators say he lied on his citizenship application.

Bosnian authorities have stepped up their investigation into how hundreds of Arabs obtained Bosnian citizenship. According to a high-ranking police source speaking to The Jamestown Foundation, 104 naturalized citizens are in the process of having their citizenship revoked. Yet, the whereabouts of 64 of those being targeted remain unknown. The Bosnian government believes that these people present a potential security threat, and Western intelligence agencies agree. Western agencies are cooperating with Bosnian authorities in the terrorism investigation and pressuring local officials to locate and conduct checks on the 64 naturalized citizens who remain unaccounted for—some of whom authorities believe may have been in touch with Bektasevic and the other suspects (Nezavisne Novine, May 25).

Most of these naturalized citizens are believed to live in Sarajevo and the central Bosnian towns of Zenica, Tuzla and Travnik. Since late last year, police have conducted several raids in the mountains surrounding those towns, suspecting that militants have training camps there and caches of weapons and explosives. Thus far, however, nothing has turned up.

Without a significant amount of technical and other assistance from Western intelligence and security forces, Bosnia is ill-equipped to prevent terrorist infiltration. Recent police reforms—including one significant reform that created a state-level police agency replacing the two separate Bosniak-Croat Federation and Republika Srpska agencies—are only embryonic and untested, as is cooperation between the present three agencies.

Although Islamic extremism is not nearly as prevalent in Bosnia as it is in many Western European countries, the threat must also be measured against its security forces' counter-terrorism capabilities, which in this case are starting from ground zero. Furthermore, while secular Bosnia is far from being a sympathetic haven for Islamic extremist activities, its institutional weaknesses and its wartime history of having been "saved" in part by Arab mujahideen could make it an easy and symbolic meeting and recruitment point for a new, white al-Qaeda network.

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The Talibanization of the North-West Frontier

By Sohail Abdul Nasir

In a bid to cope with the worsening security situation in North and South Waziristan agencies, and to contain the expanding wave of Talibanization from the tribal areas to the settled areas, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf has appointed a new governor to the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). Lieutenant General (Retired) Ali Mohammad Jan Orakzai was sworn in as the new governor on May 24. In the past two years of the insurgency in the tribal areas, he is the third governor to take the leadership helm. Prior to Orakzai, Lieutenant General (Retired) Iftakhar Hussian Shah and more recently Commander Khali-ur-Rehman held the post. The quick succession of governors shows the importance that the federal government places on controlling the situation in the tribal areas, particularly in North and South Waziristan.

Prior to the start of military operations in the tribal areas, the NWFP governor was at the helm in running the administration of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) through a carefully woven network of political agents, assistant political agents and subordinate staff (each tribal agency is headed by a political agent). During the last two years of military operations, however, the corps commander of Peshawar has assumed a more important role by managing the security situation on the western border up to Balochistan (the army consists of twelve corps).
New Governor Faces Daunting Task

Ali Mohammad Jan Orakzai is facing a daunting task and great expectations are being attached with his appointment to this position because Orakzai is a tribal man, hails from FATA’s Orakzai Agency and understands tribal psyche and norms. Additionally, he was the corps commander of Peshawar from October 2001 to 2004 and retired from that same position. Orakzai was born in 1947 and was commissioned in the army in 1968. He is a graduate of the command and staff college in Quetta and has also attended military courses in the United States. Before becoming the governor, he served as secretary of defense of the production division, putting him in charge of the departments that manufacture weapons (The Nation, May 23).

Some analysts are skeptical about the success of the new governor, arguing that while he was the corps commander of Peshawar in 2002, Orakzai was the first person to deploy government troops to the tribal areas (BBC, May 24). During this time, he never admitted to the presence of al-Qaeda or the local Taliban in the area. Since Orakzai is considered a hardliner, as compared to former governor Khali-u-Rehman, the new appointment gives the impression that the federal government, instead of pursuing dialogue with the militants, is sticking with the military option.

The restoration of peace in North and South Waziristan will be a great challenge for Orakzai. The dilemma is not only that the local Taliban in North Waziristan are not ready to speak with the government, but they also disallow anyone else in the region from speaking with the authorities. In these troubled areas, political agents are seen only in their official functions and troops are limited merely to forts and bunkers. In this context, it is a big question whether the civil administration—responsible for development work, law-and-order and political and administrative tasks—can be activated again in FATA.

Attempts to Revitalize the Political Administration in FATA

Prior to the appointment of the new governor, the federal government was examining ways to revitalize the political administration in FATA. On May 23, The Nation published a detailed report which said that the federal government was considering the replacement of presently posted political agents in the troubled agencies with more competent ones to improve the administration of FATA. Sahibzada Intiaz, a retired bureaucrat, has been assigned by Musharraf to make proposals in this regard and to suggest the names of competent officers who can carry out the assignment. Sahibzada has already prepared a reform package to improve the situation in the FATA area.

Changes will take place as soon as the proposals reach Islamabad. The president has also endorsed another proposal by Intiaz to bring the Frontier Constabulary—primarily a border security and paramilitary force, but also one that maintains law and order elsewhere in the country—back under the administrative control of the political agents. Until 1996, the Frontier Constabulary was working under the political agents; after 1996, however, the inspector general of the Frontier Constabulary had been given the administration of the paramilitary forces guarding the 1600 kilometer border with Afghanistan and Iran. The government also has decided to strengthen the "levies" (tribal militia forces) in FATA to minimize the deployment of the armed forces in the area. Presently, the levies are only active in Kurrum Agency, Khyber Agency and Orakzai Agency; the government is considering the establishment of levies in North and South Waziristan in order to reduce the deployment of regular army forces.

An additional change involves the manner in which political agents are selected. Political agents are normally selected from the District Management Group, a group of civil service members who run the different district-level governments; it was previously considered an elite group due to its extensive powers, but has been weakened recently as a result of the decentralization of authority program undertaken by Musharraf. Under the new arrangement, competent officers from other federal services could potentially be appointed as political agents.

The political administration in the tribal areas certainly needs positive changes if the government sincerely wants to normalize the situation. For a long time, the tribal masses have protested against the way the political administration has treated them. Maltreatment by the political administration and political and economic backwardness drives tribesmen to the local Taliban. A former officer of the Pakistani Army and elder of the Mehsood tribe, retired Brigadier Malik Qayyum Sher, said that the local Taliban have their own agenda and are faithfully acting upon it, and that announcements of development programs by Musharraf will not have any effect on their actions. While speaking to the BBC,
he revealed that the Pakistani Army itself maintains contacts with the local Taliban and that local people have sympathies for them. He admitted that he himself was in contact with the local Taliban and did not find any harm in maintaining this contact. He believed that military operations were not the solution and that the government would have to reach a settlement with the local Taliban (Islam, April 27).

Local Taliban Continue to Establish Control

The local Taliban in North Waziristan does not seem to be in a mood of reconciliation with the government. Rather, they are busy undertaking actions that include the investigation of the 18 tribal chiefs who met Musharraf and violated the ban prohibiting contacts with the government (Daily Times, May 23). For the past two months, these meetings between tribal chiefs and government officials have been occurring in Rawalpindi and in Peshawar. Musharraf is now frequently consulting every relevant quarter about the situation in the Waziristan agencies. Abdullah Farhad, a spokesman for the local Taliban, told reporters that a shura council would decide the fate of two tribal chiefs, Mir Sharof Ederkhel and Nawab Khan Borakhel, who had met the president. "Sharof and Khan have admitted meeting the president was a mistake and pleaded for mercy," said Farhad. Sharof confirmed contacting the government, saying he had attended the meeting to plead for the military’s withdrawal from the tribal regions.

The local Taliban is concerned with not only the enforcement of Sharia law, but also the waging of jihad against intruders (i.e., U.S.-led coalition forces) in Afghanistan. Haji Omar, one of the leaders of the local Taliban in South Waziristan agency, told the BBC that jihad against foreign troops will continue until U.S. and other foreign soldiers completely withdraw from Afghanistan. He threatened to increase the attacks on U.S. troops in Afghanistan and said that there would be no negotiation with intruders. He explained that the Taliban have no enmity with the Pakistani Army, but if the military carried out operations against them, they would have to defend themselves. He accused the Karzai government of sending spies into Pakistan's tribal areas to detect the presence of al-Qaeda elements. Haji Omar said that a number of such spies have been captured and killed (Mashraq, April 22).

Some members of the media are doubtful that the government will once again apply the obsolete method of using the political agent system to control the worsening situation in Waziristan where military operations have already aggravated the conflict and hollowed the foundations of the political administration system. After controlling North and South Waziristan, the Talibanization movement is stretching to the southern parts of NWFP which include Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu and Tank. The Taliban have destroyed the authority and traditional tribal system by killing tribal elders (Khabrain, May 12).

Conclusion

Musharraf stated that military operations in the tribal areas will continue until the total elimination of foreign terrorists. While addressing a special meeting to review the situation in FATA, he proposed that if tribes were to expel or hand over terrorists to the government, the operations in the region would be stopped. He said that he would expedite the developmental work in the tribal areas and finalize the schemes of industrialization with the cooperation of the United States. Musharraf said that these industries would provide immense employment opportunities for local youth (Nawa-i-Waqt, May 10). Musharraf seems sincere in implementing his designs, although the success of the entire process needs to involve all sections of tribal society (Nawa-i-Waqt, May 13).

Indeed, after being sworn into office, the new governor unexpectedly spoke about peaceful resolution of the conflict in North Waziristan. Orakzai said that he would prefer using peaceful means instead of force to restore law and order in the tribal regions. In his first remarks after taking the oath of office, he said, "Eventually all problems are resolved through talks." The governor said it would be his endeavor to tackle issues through peaceful means: "I am confident that we will succeed in resolving all issues through mutual consultations and talks." He said that law and order was the most important issue before him and he would strive to restore normalcy in the tribal region. Orakzai said that as a native of the tribal region and as the corps commander of Peshawar for two and a half years, he had observed that tribesmen were peace-loving people. "But some of them who are misguided would be put on the right path," he remarked (Dawn, May 25).

It is believed that the tribesmen can be dealt with only by those who have a true perception about tribal norms and values. The British, when they ruled the region, successfully followed this principle and consequently introduced the system of local political administration,
which mainly banks upon the tribal jirga system comprising tribal elders. Governor Orakzai himself hails from a pure tribal family and is also a retired general. He is the most qualified person available at the moment to tackle the worsening situation in the tribal areas by applying military tactics and extending the political process.

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Islam, Jamaats and Implications for the North Caucasus - Part 2

By Andrew McGregor

For "Islam, Jamaats and Implications for the North Caucasus - Part 1," please see Terrorism Monitor, Volume IV, Issue 11, June 2.

Many of the military leaders of the North Caucasian jamaats were trained by warlord Ruslan Gelayev in the Pankisi Gorge before he led his guerrilla forces back into Ingushetia and Chechnya in the fall of 2002. Gelayev, like Shamil Basayev, was a graduate of the pan-Caucasian movement and commanded fighters from the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic (KBR) and the Karachai-Cherkessian Republic (KCR) in the 1999 raids on Dagestan. A young fighter named Muslim Atayev emerged as the leader of approximately 30 Kabardino-Balkarians in Gelayev's command. Shortly after participating in the battle of Galashki in Ingushetia, Atayev was detailed to lead his men back into the KBR to set up a resistance group. Based in the mountains, this group evolved into the Yarmuk Jamaat. The name of the jamaat reflects its military intent, referring to the Yarmuk River near the Golan Heights where an outnumbered army of Muslims inflicted a decisive defeat on the forces of the Byzantine Empire in 636 AD.

The Yarmuk Jamaat armed itself through an attack on the Federal Drug Control Service (FSKN) headquarters in December 2004. Atayev justified the attack (in which four Kabardin policemen were killed) by accusing the Drug Control Service of being the main distributor for narcotics in the region (Kavkaz Center, December 15, 2004). Basayev visited Atayev in Baksan where future operations were planned. Atayev was eventually killed in a Nalchik gun battle in January 2005.

Shamil Basayev also has deep roots in the pan-Caucasian movement, particularly with his involvement in the military activities of the Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus in the early 1990s. His raids on Dagestan in 1999 also had a strong pan-Caucasian element, with many of the fighters under his command originating from North Caucasus republics other than Chechnya. It is these contacts that Basayev has exploited successfully in building a centralized command for the region’s disparate resistance groups. Aslan Maskhadov’s successor as president, Sheikh Abdul-Khalim Sadulayev, appears to share Basayev’s sentiments, calling for the liberation and unification of the entire Caucasus. Recently, he went so far as to offer Chechnya’s complete support to Georgia’s struggle with what Sadulayev termed "Russia’s terrorist activity and imperial ambitions" (Chechenpress, May 15, 2005).

The Caucasian Jamaats in Action

Russian authorities still claim that the 1999 bombings of Moscow apartment blocks were carried out by a KCR jamaat under the direction of the late Arab mujahideen commander Ibn al-Khattab. In recent years, urban shootouts with members of the KCR’s Jamaat No. 3 have become common. The organization has been accused by security services of directing suicide bombers in Moscow.

In the last two years, the jamaats have engaged in urban warfare in cities across the Caucasus. This fighting is usually of two types, the first being planned actions by insurgents designed to eliminate selected targets and seize arms for further operations. The second arises when federal intelligence or police discover the presence of jamaat members in urban safe houses. In these cases, a crisis typically develops when the insurgents refuse to surrender. Long gun battles have followed in most cases that have exposed a tendency by state security forces to use maximum force, often with mixed results. The inevitable security sweeps and abductions that follow do little to reassure residents of the North Caucasus that Moscow can be called upon to protect the local population.

Jamaats are active elsewhere besides the KBR. In Ingushetia, the local Sharia Jamaat has been active in bombings and attacks on security forces as well as participating in the Basayev-led raid on the Ingushetian city of Nazran in June 2002. In Dagestan, another
Sharia Jamaat is engaged in a violent struggle with the republic’s Interior Ministry forces that threatens to rival the conflict in Chechnya. According to Sadulayev, these jamaats, as well as others in the Adygea, Stavropol and Krasnodar regions, pledged their allegiance to him after the death of Aslan Maskhadov (Gazeta Wyborcza, September 9, 2005). Sadulayev himself was amir of the Argun military jamaat before the current Chechen war erupted.

The Raid on Nalchik

The Nalchik raid of October 2005 differed from the previous year’s raid in Nazran in that it was directed and carried out almost exclusively by local militants, rather than by Chechen fighters who needed to be transported to Nazran and back to safe bases in Chechnya. Even Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov announced that there were no "outside gunmen" present at Nalchik (Pravda.ru, October 16, 2005). The KBR’s minister of culture noted that the militants did not belong to any one ethnic group, suggesting that the attacks were not just an eruption of Balkar dissatisfaction. The raid demonstrated how independent jamaats could mobilize in the "Caucasus Front" envisioned by Aslan Maskhadov, and now pursued by his successor, Sadulayev. KBR President Arsen Kanokov noted that low income and unemployment had "created the soil for religious extremists and other destructive forces to conduct an ideological war against us" (AP, October 14, 2005).

Yet, while the militants were mostly local, their commanders werenot. A look at the operational command demonstrates how the Chechen-style command structure works in action. Basayev carried out what he describes as "general operative management." By accepted rules, the amir responsible for the sector in which the action is to take place assumes operational command (Kavkaz Center, October 15, 2005). In this case, it was Anzor Astemirov (also known as Amir Seifulla). The amirs of other sectors were each given responsibilities under Astemirov’s command. One of those killed in the assault on Nalchik’s FSB headquarters was Ilyas Gorchkanov, the leader of the Ingush Jamaat. The amirs of Ossetia and Krasnodar regions were also wounded.

After the raid, Astemirov correctly pointed out that despite months of preparation, no one in the local population betrayed the militants. For his part, Russian Presidential Representative Dimitri Kozak was vocal in his criticism of the lack of intelligence available on the Yarmuk Jamaat. In fact, Russia’s advance knowledge of the raid came from the interrogation of a captured militant, Anzor Zhagurazov, who revealed plans for a large-scale attack on Nalchik five days before it happened. A cache of a half ton of explosives was discovered based on his information, and several hundred members of the Russian special forces were sent to Nalchik. Despite this, the militants carried out an assault on government and military targets that lasted several hours and reaped large quantities of captured weapons; at least 40 militants were killed. The attack on Nalchik appears to have been planned to coincide with a similar attack in Dagestan that was prevented by the death of several of its main planners in a Russian operation.

Astemirov compared the raid to the Battle of Uhud, fought in 625 AD by the Muslims of Medina against the Meccans (Kavkaz Center, January 10). The Muslim army of Muhammad suffered a setback that day due to their overconfidence, but eventually regrouped to emerge triumphant. Astemirov also suggested that the anti-Russian jihad must be fought on the home ground of all the Muslims of the North Caucasus.

The militarization of the jamaat movement may yet provide Sadulayev with the power base he needs to assume the role of Imam of the Caucasus. The job of centralizing control will be difficult, and will ultimately expose members of the network. The Chechen leadership, however, realizes that the Kremlin has succeeded in closing Chechnya to the outside world. The conflict with Russia has settled into a war of attrition, which the Chechens cannot possibly win. Without spreading the conflict, their best hope is for a withdrawal of Russian forces, allowing for a civil war with the pro-Moscow forces of Ramzan Kadyrov. A full blown fratricidal struggle would reduce the fighting strength of Chechnya to insignificance, a solution to the "Chechen Problem" that might prove satisfactory in Moscow.

Recent political developments in the Caucasus have reminded many residents of the troubled history of the region’s relations with Russia. As memories surface of the Circassian exodus and Stalin's deportations, the limited benefits of Russian rule threaten to be overwhelmed by history. Imam Shamyl’s 19th century rebellion is undergoing a revival in popularity. In current conditions, the attraction of a revived Imamate under the direction of Abdul-Khalim Sadulayev may be great enough to make young militants forget that Shamyl’s three decades of rebellion ended in the utter devastation of his followers in Dagestan and Chechnya (as Vladimir
Putin has lately taken to reminding citizens of the North Caucasus).

Conclusion

While it is difficult to envision the jamaats as a military threat to the Russian Federation, it may prove impossible for the Kremlin to deal effectively with five insurgencies at once, or to address international questions as to why Russian rule in the region has spun out of control. Bombings and other attacks have spread right into the Stavropol and Krasnodar regions of the Russian Republic, indicating an ever-widening scope of operations for anti-Russian militants.

The Islamic combat jamaat in the North Caucasus is more than a religious phenomenon. Economic and territorial issues are also important factors in the recruitment of young fighters, who otherwise find themselves unemployed and disenfranchised. Last November, President Putin's envoy, Dimitri Kozak, warned that the proliferation of what he describes as "Islamic Sharia enclaves" in remote areas of the Caucasus would soon immerse the entire region in conflict. This result was inevitable if military measures were taken without addressing state corruption and other social and economic problems. In these conditions, the revival of the dormant pan-Caucasus movement has found a rallying point in Salafist Islam, but one rooted in local tradition with local leaders. Russia's pre-emptive counter-terrorism policy and repression of Islamic activities outside the realm of state-approved Islamic structures continues to feed the insurgency. The emergence of the "military jamaat" threatens to stretch Russian resources to the limit and turn the North Caucasus into a minefield of anti-Russian resistance.

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