

Conclusion

On May 15, 2010, the ISI purportedly announced that it has appointed new leaders to replace those lost in the U.S.-Iraqi operation that killed al-Baghdadi and al-Masri.¹⁶ According to the statement, the new leaders are “Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husseini al-Qurashi, the Emir of the Believers of the Islamic State of Iraq” and “Sheikh Abu Abdullah al-Hassani al-Qurashi is his prime minister and deputy.”¹⁷ The ISI had already announced a new minister of war, Abu Suleiman, who will replace Abu Ayyub al-Masri, who served that role in addition to being the head of AQI. Abu Suleiman vowed revenge for the killings of al-Masri and al-Baghdadi, warning of “a long gloomy night and dark days colored in blood” and urging followers not to “become accustomed to having a loose hand on the trigger.”¹⁸

Leadership decapitations clearly have an effect on terrorist and militant groups. Whether or not the latest killings will put an end to AQI and the ISI remains an open question. Devastating bombings continue to rip through Iraq, with militants feeding off tensions between the country’s myriad political groups and factions. On May 10, for example, bombings, assassinations and ambushes tore through the country, killing at least 119 people and underscoring the pervasive threat.¹⁹ It is clear from jihadist web forums that many remain hopeful about the insurgency in Iraq despite the recent setbacks. Whether those hopes will be borne out on the ground remains to be seen.

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16 “Qaeda in Iraq ‘Names Replacements for Slain Leaders.’”

17 Ibid.

18 Anthony Shadid, “Iraqi Insurgent Group Names New Leaders,” *New York Times*, May 16, 2010.

19 “Iraq Boosts Security after 119 Killed in Attacks,” CBS News, May 11, 2010.

The Kidnapping and Execution of Khalid Khwaja in Pakistan

By Rahimullah Yusufzai

ON MARCH 26, 2010, two well-known former officials in Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and a British journalist went missing in North Waziristan Agency in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Before heading out to the tribal areas, the men told acquaintances that the purpose of the trip was to make a documentary on the Taliban and U.S. drone strikes.¹ The men, however, were abducted by a previously unknown militant group, the Asian Tigers. The group announced that it was holding hostage Khalid Khwaja, retired Colonel Sultan Amir Tarar (commonly referred to as Colonel Imam), and journalist Asad Qureshi. In exchange for the men’s release, the Asian Tigers demanded that Pakistan’s authorities release from custody three important Afghan Taliban leaders: Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, Maulawi Kabir and Mansour Dadullah.²

After the 10-day demand deadline expired, the Asian Tigers executed the elderly Khwaja and dumped his body on the roadside near Mir Ali in North Waziristan.³ It repeated its earlier demand, but also ordered the freedom of 120 militants held by Pakistan. Moreover, the group insisted on \$10 million ransom for the release of Qureshi.⁴ Subsequently, Asian Tigers spokesman Mohammad Omar made it clear that Colonel Imam and Qureshi would not be freed until 160 of their men, all militants, were released by Pakistan’s authorities.⁵

1 This information is based on a personal interview with Khalid Khwaja. Also see Rahimullah Yusufzai, “The Kidnapped,” *The News International*, April 27, 2010.

2 Iqbal Khattak, “Jehadi Channels’ Opened to Secure Release of Former ISI Spies,” *Daily Times*, April 23, 2010. There is no concrete evidence, however, that Kabir, the former Taliban governor for Nangarhar and Logar provinces and now military commander for eastern Afghanistan, is in Pakistani custody.

3 “Ex-ISI Official Khalid Khwaja Found Dead in FATA,” *Dawn*, April 30, 2010.

4 Mushtaq Yusufzai, “No Real Effort by Govt, Tribal Elders to Secure Release of Col Imam, Qureshi,” *The News International*, May 15, 2010.

5 This demand was addressed directly to this author over the phone on May 14, 2010.

This article provides information on the Asian Tigers, and explains the significance of the kidnapping and execution of Khalid Khwaja. Khwaja, for example, reportedly once maintained contacts with Osama bin Ladin and served as a facilitator between the Pakistani government and various jihadist groups. His surprising assassination reveals the changing composition of the overall Taliban network as a younger and less manageable generation of militants begins to take control.

The Asian Tigers and the Grievances against Khalid Khwaja

Before the recent kidnappings, the Asian Tigers were an unknown group. It is widely believed to be a front organization for a faction of Pakistani militants who previously belonged to the anti-Shi’a militant group, Lashkar-i-Jhangvi. Other reports suggest that the Asians Tigers are a faction of the Punjabi Taliban and are composed of a small group of 30-40 Punjabi and Mehsud tribal militants expelled by their parent organizations, Lashkar-i-Jhangvi and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).⁶

Preliminary information on the group can be drawn from interactions with its spokesman, Mohammad Omar. Omar speaks Urdu, unlike the TTP’s Pashtu-language spokesmen and commanders, suggesting that he is from a group of Punjabi Taliban that has shifted operations from Pakistan’s Punjab Province to North Waziristan.⁷ This group could be operating out of the Mir Ali area under the protection of local tribal militants.

Based on Khwaja’s brutal execution, the Asian Tigers clearly targeted him specifically. Some analysts believe that the group’s motive relates to Khwaja’s past actions, when he reportedly demanded that TTP leaders Hakimullah Mehsud and Waliur Rahman “get rid” of 14 senior Pakistani Taliban commanders—mostly Punjabis associated with Lashkar-i-Jhangvi—for allegedly being on the payroll of India’s

6 Mushtaq Yusufzai, “Asian Tigers’ Kill Khalid Khwaja on Expiry of Deadline,” *The News International*, May 1, 2010.

7 This observation was noted during the author’s telephone conversation with Mohammad Omar.

intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW).⁸ If these reports are true, Hakimullah Mehsud must have been uneasy over the list since it contained the name of his cousin, Qari Hussain Mehsud.⁹ Qari Hussain is a top Pakistani Taliban leader known as the master trainer of suicide bombers.¹⁰ Others on the list included Qari Zafar, who is thought to be close to the senior TTP leadership.¹¹ Qari Zafar was wanted for planning the March 2006 attack on the U.S. Consulate in Karachi, which killed U.S. diplomat David Foy. He was reportedly killed, however, in a U.S. drone strike earlier this year.¹²

The Asian Tigers had other grievances against Khwaja. They accused him of betraying the *Lal Masjid* (Red Mosque) clerics during their showdown with Pakistani security forces in the heart of Islamabad in 2007. The Asian Tigers claimed that Khwaja lured Maulana Abdul Aziz out of the mosque only to have him arrested. This allegation, however, was refuted by Abdul Aziz himself, and he led the funeral prayers for Khwaja after his body was returned to Islamabad for burial.¹³

Nevertheless, the Asian Tigers' spokesman denounced Khwaja as an agent of the ISI and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. The Asian Tigers charged that Khwaja opposed the Pakistani Taliban since he had called them "terrorists." The Asian Tigers also alleged that Khwaja and Col. Imam were visiting North Waziristan on the advice of former Pakistan Army Chief General Mirza Aslam Beg, retired ISI Lieutenant General Hamid Gul and serving ISI official Colonel Sajjad.¹⁴

Before executing Khwaja, the Asian Tigers forced him to make a number of statements on video. In the video,

Khwaja, under duress, admitted to being an ISI and CIA agent, and accepted guilt for the arrest of *Lal Masjid* cleric Maulana Abdul Aziz. Khwaja also said that certain jihadist commanders—such as Fazlur Rahman Khalil, Masood Azhar and Abdullah Shah Mazhar, along with militant organizations such as Jaysh-i-Muhammad, Harkat-ul-Mujahidin, Lashkar-i-Tayyiba, Jamiatul Mujahidin and al-Badr—were still operating as proxies for the ISI.¹⁵

These statements demonstrate the various divisions between jihadist groups in Pakistan. By having Khwaja "confess" to links with the ISI and CIA, the Asian Tigers not only wanted to justify his execution, but also to discredit opposing jihadist groups by associating them with the ISI. This move also allowed the Asian Tigers to show its independence from Pakistan's government, portraying themselves as more legitimate jihadists.

State of Affairs in North Waziristan

The kidnapping and subsequent execution of Khwaja highlights the complexities of the situation in North Waziristan. The Punjabi Taliban and other militant groups are able to operate in the tribal agency with the help of local tribal militants. These fighters are reportedly concentrated in the Mir Ali area, where Mehsud Taliban from South Waziristan have found refuge with tribal militants from the Daur tribe. There have also been reports about the presence of Uzbek militants from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, along with other foreigners including Arabs linked with al-Qa`ida, in the Mir Ali area. The Afghan Taliban's Haqqani network also maintains a presence in North Waziristan.

Much of the recent movement of fighters into North Waziristan came as a result of Pakistan's ongoing military offensive in South Waziristan. As Pakistan poured troops into that agency, many fighters simply moved north into the adjacent tribal agencies. Pakistan has been reluctant to undertake military activity in North Waziristan out of concern over uniting all the militant

and tribal groups in the region against it. Pakistan's government, for example, made a peace deal with North Waziristan militants led by Hafiz Gul Bahadur before it moved against the TTP in South Waziristan. Pakistan's security forces also do not want to open too many fronts at one time out of concern of

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stretching the military's resources and exposing its supply lines. Nevertheless, at some point the military will have to undertake a military operation in North Waziristan to deny further sanctuary for the tribal area's militants.

The militants' movement into North Waziristan, however, has not been without conflict. There are reports that Hafiz Gul Bahadur is angry over the provocative actions of Punjabi Taliban groups—such as the Asian Tigers—and the Mehsud Taliban.¹⁶ Their confrontational actions only increase the odds that Pakistan's military will spread its offensive to North Waziristan, drawing Bahadur's forces into the fight. Moreover, militant forces in North Waziristan are always subject to possible attack by U.S. drone aircraft.

Conclusion

The fate of the two hostages still hangs in the balance. Pakistan's government is unlikely to release all of the militants demanded by the Asian Tigers, as many are dangerous or have already been convicted in the court system. The government may agree to release some, but not necessarily enough to satisfy the kidnapers.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 “Pakistani Taliban Confirm Death of Qari Zafar,” *Dawn*, March 2, 2010.

13 Kashif Abbasi, “LJ Killed My Father: Usama Khalid,” *The Nation*, May 1, 2010. Also see “Khalid Khwaja Laid to Rest in Islamabad,” *Daily Express*, May 2, 2010.

14 “Confessions of a Spy,” *Daily Times Monitor*, April 24, 2010; Nadir Hassan, “Who Killed Ex-ISI Official?” *Express Tribune*, April 30, 2010.

15 Hamid Mir, “What Was the Last Mission of Khalid Khwaja?” *The News International*, May 2, 2010; “Confessions of a Spy.”

16 Malik Mumtaz Khan, “NWA Taliban Vow to Adhere to Peace Accord,” *The News International*, May 15, 2010.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this incident. The kidnappings and Khwaja's subsequent execution show the generational change among militants in Pakistan and the evolving relationship between the ISI and Taliban fighters. Khwaja, for example, was a controversial figure due to his associations with the ISI and links with certain militant groups. After he retired from the military, he worked as a lawyer and defended suspected militants and Islamist politicians.¹⁷ He even reportedly once maintained contacts with Usama bin Ladin. It appears that the Asian Tigers killed him as revenge against the ISI and against the jihadist groups it believes are still working for the spy agency.

The new generation of militants in Pakistan is more independent and is pursuing more radical goals. Moreover, these domestic militant groups share links with transnational terrorist networks such as al-Qa`ida, and they are angry with Pakistan's government for aligning with the United States and NATO in the "war on terrorism." It appears that they want to embarrass Pakistan's government and force it to accept their demands. Future kidnapping attempts of high-profile security officials and other more aggressive tactics are likely as the Pakistani Taliban grow more diffuse and increasingly unpredictable.

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The Sources of the Abu Sayyaf's Resilience in the Southern Philippines

By Rommel C. Banlaoi

SINCE THE LAUNCHING of the global war on terrorism in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, the Philippines has been engaged in a prolonged military campaign against the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). Key ASG leaders have been killed in this battle, while others have been imprisoned for various crimes associated with terrorism. Despite these successes, authorities have not been able to eliminate the ASG completely, and the group remains a threat to Philippine internal security. Even after losing key field commanders, the ASG is still able to replenish its membership primarily from affected and influenced villages in Sulu, Basilan and Tawi-Tawi (BASULTA) in the southern Philippines.

After providing a brief background of the ASG, this article examines the sources of the ASG's resilience in the face of government and international pressure. It argues that the ASG is a product of complex tensions in the southern Philippines, where criminal, political and militant groups at times collaborate to achieve shared goals. It also shows the limits of countering terrorism in the southern Philippines.

A Deeper Look at the Founding of the ASG

Analysts traditionally trace the evolution of the ASG to Abdurajak Janjalani, who reportedly founded the group in the early 1990s. While there is no doubt that the ASG's original ideological foundation is attributed to the political and religious ideas of Abdurajak, what he actually organized was a group called al-Harakatul al-Islamiyyah (AHAI) or the Islamic Movement, whose original members were drawn from his followers in Jamaa Tableegh, an Islamic propagation group that he formed in Basilan in the early 1980s.¹ Abdurajak officially declared

the creation of AHAH in 1989 to pursue *Jihad Fi Sabilillah*, defined as "fighting and dying for the cause of Islam."² Yet it was only in 1993 when AHAH formally organized with Abdurajak as the *amir*.³

Since the formal launch of AHAH in 1989, Abdurajak delivered several *khutbahs* or sermons and released several *fatawa* using the *nom-de-guerre* "Abu Sayyaf," in honor of Afghan resistance fighter Abdul Rasul Sayyaf.⁴ While Abdurajak idolized this Afghan leader, the suggestion that Abdurajak was an Afghan war veteran is still a subject for verification.⁵ Some living Filipino Afghan war veterans, for example, have challenged the claim that Abdurajak actually fought in the Afghan war—arguing instead that it was his younger brother, Hector, who participated in the conflict.⁶

Abdurajak's *khutbahs* and *fatawa* became popular not only in Basilan but also in Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Zamboanga City. His popularity caught the ire of police and military authorities because Abdurajak was associated with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), a group that declared jihad against the Philippine government. Since Abdurajak used the pen name "Abu Sayyaf," the military described his followers as a group of Abu Sayyaf, which was popularized in media as the Abu Sayyaf Group, or ASG. The popularity of this group spread widely in Mindanao and was locally known as Juma'a Abu Sayyaf. In August 1991, Abdurajak publicly used the name ASG in connection with the bombing of the *MV Doulos*, a Christian missionary ship docked at the Zamboanga City port.⁷

From Islamic Movement to a Bandit Group

From an Islamic movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the ASG received the label of a bandit group from the

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Personal interview, Noor Muog, former member of the Abu Sayyaf Group, April 8, 2010.

⁶ There is need to conduct research on the life and stories of Filipino Muslim veterans of the Afghan war. Some have died, some have been imprisoned but there are still remaining veterans all over Mindanao. There are a few staying in Muslim communities in Manila trying to make a living peacefully.

⁷ "Abu Sayyaf Kidnappings, Bombings and Other Attacks," GMANews.tv, August 23, 2007.

¹ For a more detailed history, see Rommel C. Banlaoi, "The Abu Sayyaf Group and Terrorism in the Southern Philippines Seven Years After 9/11: Threat and Response," Philippine Institute for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, September 2008.