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Al-Qaeda in Pakistan

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Al-Qaeda in Pakistan

Shaun Gregory¹

“[Al-Qaeda] are cultivating stronger operational connections and relationships that radiate outward from their leaders' secure hideout in Pakistan to affiliates throughout the Middle East, North Africa and Europe”.

John Negroponte, US National Intelligence Director, 12 January 2007.

Almost unobserved in the West, an upsurge of suicide bombings has taken place over the past few months in Pakistan, reaching two or more attacks per week. The targets have included Islamabad's Marriott hotel favoured by international visitors [January 26th]; a contingent of Pakistani policeman near a Shiite mosque in Peshawar in which 14 were killed [January 27th]; a checkpoint guard at Dera Ismail Khan [Jan 29th]; a car bomb attack killing two Pakistani soldiers in Tank [February 3rd] an attack on Islamabad's main airport [February 7th]; and an attack on a Quetta courtroom [February 17th] which killed 15.

According to official Pakistani sources the responsibility for this violence rests with pro-Taliban tribal groups. However, there are strong reasons for arguing that a significant part of the Taliban under the leadership of Mullah Dadullah now has Pakistani support for their uprising in 2007² and that consequently attacks by these groups on Pakistani forces and infrastructure would make little sense at this time. More likely the attacks are being carried out by a number of groups including Al-Qaeda and those tribal/Taliban groups who have no loyalty to Dadullah. If so the attacks would make sense in terms of trying to impose a strain on Pakistan-Taliban relations and unravel the Pakistani deal with Dadullah which, if successful, risks the marginalisation of Al-Qaeda and Mullah Omar. The attacks also mirror violence in Iraq and Afghanistan and may further be understood as part of a broader Al-Qaeda strategy to destabilise the Islamic world from Algeria to Pakistan through an escalation of violence directed at Western interests, the security forces of pro-Western Islamic governments, and Shia communities.

That Al-Qaeda are resurgent in Pakistan, as the US National Intelligence Director John Negroponte asserts, is clear. The deals in Southern³ and Northern⁴ Waziristan agreed between tribal groups supportive of the Taliban and Pakistan have taken the pressure off Al-Qaeda in the tribal areas. Widely seen as deals which play into the hands of the Taliban, Pakistan's agreements not fight the tribal groups nor to pursue foreign fighters⁵ has created the context for the resurgence of the Taliban⁶ – which

¹ The author is indebted to James Revill for research support and to Chris Fair at USIP for comments and discussions on several points. Responsibility for any errors is entirely the author's.

² See Syed Saleem Shahzad, *Pakistan, The Taliban and Dadullah*, PSRU Report No 3, March 2007.

³ The so-called Sargodha peace deal of February 2005 agreed the disengagement of Pakistani armed forces from the region in return for the commitment of tribal groups not to attack Pakistani forces. See: Ismail Khan, “Waziristan Draft Accord Approved”, *Dawn*, 2 February 2005.

⁴ Pazir Gul, “Waziristan Accord Signed”, *Dawn*, 5 September 2006, p 1. This deal also agreed a no-combat deal with tribal groups.

⁵ The Waziristan accords require tribal groups to “ensure the departure” of foreign fighters and end cross-border movement for militant activity but the Taliban and pro-Taliban tribal groups have not observed these terms and by agreeing to end the use of force the Pakistan military has no means to

very much suits Pakistan's interests in Afghanistan – and for the return of Al-Qaeda which does not.

It is equally clear that Al-Qaeda leadership has somehow managed to reactivate at least some of its financial conduits and thus has the means again to begin to assert direct influence on Al-Qaeda operations within Afghanistan/Pakistan, to reconstitute training camps in Pakistan⁷, and to directly influence again the networks around the world loyal to Al-Qaeda's agenda if not directly subordinate to the leadership. An example of the latter is the renewal of the relationship between Al-Qaeda and the Algerian terrorist group the *Groupe Salafiste pour la Predication et le Combat* [GSPC] which dates back to the mid 1990s⁸. On Sept 11th 2006 the two groups announced a new alliance and on 25th January 2007 the GSPC announced its renaming as "*L'organisation Al-Qaeda au pays de Maghreb Islamique*"⁹. The renamed group has since stepped up attacks in Algeria against the state's security forces and against Western interests¹⁰.

Pakistan has also replaced Afghanistan as a key state for the training and indoctrination of Al-Qaeda recruits for operations abroad and for the training and support by Al-Qaeda of those indoctrinated and radicalised elsewhere¹¹. The Director General of Britain's MI5 made a keynote speech in November 2006 in which the nature of this threat was explained. Speaking of around 30 known Islamic terrorist plots in the UK presently subject to MI5 surveillance, Dame Eliza Manningham Buller noted "these plots often have links back to Al-Qaida [sic] in Pakistan and through those links Al-Qaida gives guidance and training to its largely British foot soldiers here on an extensive *and growing* [emphasis added] scale"¹². Certainly there is strong evidence that from Pakistan Al-Qaeda directed both the 7/7 2005 London bombings¹³ and the alleged plot to blow up US-bound aircraft from Heathrow in the

enforce such a request. At the same time the Northern Waziristan deal was announced Pakistan Army spokesman Major General Shaukat Sultan was widely reported as stating that a "no arrest" deal had been concluded with Osama Bin Laden himself by the Pakistan military "provided he lived as a peaceful citizen". The remarks were subsequently renounced as a "gross misquote" and corrected by the Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, but there is no doubt that the Waziristan deals have left Al-Qaeda and Bin Laden/Al-Zawahiri at greater freedom than at any point since 9/11. See: CNN, "Pakistan; No Bin Laden Arrest Deal", 6 September 2006, at

www.cnn.com/2006/world/asiapcf/09/06/pakistan.afghanistan/index.html

⁶ Eben Kaplan, "The Taliban Resurgence in Afghanistan", *Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounder Briefing*, CFR, 30 May 2006.

⁷ Mark Mazzetti and David Rohde, "Terror Officials See AQ Chiefs Regaining Power", *New York Post*, 19 February 2007.

⁸ Shaun Gregory, "France and the War on Terrorism", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol 15 (1), Spring 2003, pp 124-147.

⁹ "Un groupe Allie d'Al-Qaeda annonce changer de nom sur "ordre de Ben Laden", 26 January 2007, Cassafree, at : www.cassafree.com/modules/news/print/php?storyid=8230

¹⁰ "Al Qaeda revendique les attentats en Algerie", *Monde*, 13 February 2007, at www.cyberpress.ca/article/20070213/cpmonde/70213119

¹¹ Bronwen Maddox, "How the Road to Terror Leads Back to Pakistan", *London Times*, 11 August 2006.

¹² For the full text of the speech see MI5's website at <http://www.mi5.gov.uk/output/Page568.html>

¹³ House of Commons, *Report of the Official Account of Bombing in London on 7th July 2005.*, London: The Stationery Office, 2006, and ISC (Intelligence and Security Committee) *Report into the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005.* London: The Stationery Office, 2005. For an excellent analysis of the Pakistan connection to terrorism in the UK see: Julian Richards, "Contemporary

summer of 2006¹⁴. In the first of these operations the evidence suggests that two of the bombers – Mohammed Siddique Khan and Shehzad Tanweer – made trips to Pakistan between November 2004 and February 2005 during which they disappeared within Pakistan for several weeks. At least one of them – Siddique Khan - attended a Madrassah and spent time at one or more terrorist training camps in Pakistan. Reports suggest he may have had some training at a Lashkar-e-Toiba¹⁵ camp near Kotli in Pakistan Administered Kashmir or in Southern Waziristan. The former would appear to illustrate and reinforce the idea of growing links between AQ and Pakistan-backed separatists. Such a link would also raise the issue of the involvement of Pakistan's ISI given the close links between the ISI and L-e-T, although it would be too much of a stretch to link the ISI directly to the 7/7 London bombings¹⁶.

There are, moreover, important grounds to argue that the conditions are ripe for Al-Qaeda to continue its renewal and reassert its leadership and authority from Pakistan. At least five trends in Pakistan are playing into Al-Qaeda's hands:

- The first is the continued expansion of Madaris in Pakistan which have risen from an estimated 7,000 in 2000, to 11,000 in 2003 to 13-14,000 in 2006¹⁷. Efforts by the Pakistan government to reorientate the curricula of many of these Madaris away from jihadi radicalisation have largely failed with around 35 percent of the Madaris still not even registered under the government scheme¹⁸. While only a proportion of Madaris articulate radical ideas¹⁹, it seems that those which do are growing in number strongly supported by external funders such as Saudi Arabia's continued promotion of austere Wahhabism and by local funders themselves becoming more Islamist and estranged from the West, not least as a consequence of western bombing which takes lives indiscriminately²⁰.
- The second – mutually informing – trend is the rising radicalisation of young Pakistanis and Afghans living in Pakistan, something being fuelled by the US and NATO presence in the South Asian theatre. Many of these young men are

Terrorist Threats in the UK: The Pakistan Dimension”, *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism*, forthcoming.

¹⁴ Several of the alleged plotters made recent visits and reportedly received money wired from Pakistan see: CNN, “Terror Plot Leaves UK on Highest Level of Alert”, 11 August 2006, at <http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/europe/08/11/terror.plot/index.html>

¹⁵ For a useful background see: B. Raman, *Al Qaeda and Lashkar-e-Toiba*, SAAG Paper no 678, 5 March 2003,

¹⁶ Eben Kaplan, “The ISI and Terrorism: Behind the Accusations”, Council on Foreign Relations, 10 October 2006. at <http://www.cfr.org/publication/11644/>

¹⁷ Figures for the number of Madaris vary widely with as many as 50,000 suggested by some sources. However the more modest figure of 13-14,000 by 2005/6 is probably more accurate. See: “Special Report: School for Terror: Pakistan”, *The Economist*, 19 August 2006.

¹⁸ F. Bokhari, “Third of Madrassas in Pakistan Defy Deadline”, *Financial Times*, 30 December 2005, p 8. Amongst those registered there is strong resistance to curricula reform, partly on the grounds that the westernisation/secularisation of curricula is un-Islamic and partly because most Madaris received little or no money from the Pakistan government and thus are not susceptible to financial pressure.

¹⁹ One of the best studies of Madaris is that by Christine Fair, see her: *Islamic Education in Pakistan*, USIP, 2006.

²⁰ An embedded point is that studies of Madaris do not and cannot provide data from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas [FATA] of Pakistan where Islamist influence is strongest and so may underplay the problems. See: Tahir Andrabi, Jishnu Das, Asim Ijaz Khwaja and Tristan Zajonc. *Madrassa Metrics: The Statistics and Rhetoric of Religious Enrollment in Pakistan*, available at: http://ksghome.harvard.edu/~akhwaja/papers/madrassas_beyondcrisis_final.pdf

flocking to the Taliban and to Al-Qaeda²¹. Furthermore hundreds – if Dadullah’s interview with the British TV Channel 4²² is a guide – are offering themselves for suicide attacks.

- The third is a creeping radicalisation within the Pakistan military and intelligence services themselves fed in part by the Pakistan government’s alignment with the West and thus the requirement of military personnel to turn their guns on their own kinsmen and countrymen at the behest of the United States. The Waziri deals in part reflect internal dissent in the Pakistan military against support for the USA and the toll being exacted on the Pakistan armed forces and Pakistani peoples, particularly in the tribal areas.
- The fourth is the evolution of the long-standing links between radical terrorist groups which have been the recipients of Pakistan’s support in the past – most particularly the groups fighting for Kashmir separatism and the Taliban – and Islamist political parties²³, some in Pakistan’s military and intelligence forces, and Al-Qaeda. One critical development within this process is the emergence of indigenous Pakistani Al-Qaeda which has enhanced the relationship between Al-Qaeda and separatist/terrorist groups, such as Lashkar-e-Toiba. It is no longer possible for the government of Pakistan to portray Al-Qaeda simply as foreigners taking up residence in areas of Pakistan that the government struggles to control.
- Finally, significant amounts of illegitimate arms and money are being generated by the reestablishment of the drugs trade, the illegal trade in small arms, smuggling, crime, and the “taxation” of goods moving in and out of Afghanistan across the Pakistan border. These are finding their way to the Taliban, and to Al-Qaeda, and provide another means by which recruits to the cause can be rallied and supported.

Almost six years after the “War on Terrorism” began, US policy in the region is failing. The Taliban are back in force and the future of the Karzai government in Afghanistan looks increasingly fragile. Al-Qaeda are renewed and there are grave trends evident in Pakistan in terms of the emergence of indigenous Pakistani Al-Qaeda and a deepening relationship between Al-Qaeda, elements of the Taliban, Pakistan-supported separatist/terrorist groups, Islamist political parties, and some in Pakistan’s military and intelligence communities disillusioned by the government’s support for the United States. These forces are strengthening collectively and may yet mount a serious challenge for control of Pakistan itself²⁴.

However the military government of Pakistan and its intelligence agencies cannot take the full blame for presiding over the return of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban and the drift of Pakistan towards the edge of chaos. Much of that blame must lie with Western

²¹ See for example the data for Pakistan from the Pew Global Attitudes Surveys available from: <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=248>

²² Interview with Dadullah, screened on 23rd February 2007. Channel 4 News.

²³ One of the key concerns here is Jamaat-I-Islami, a significant player in Pakistan’s National Assembly and one of the Pakistan government’s partner parties under the MMA banner. JI party members have a long track record of association with Al-Qaeda operatives, most notably perhaps the sheltering by JI members of Al-Qaeda’s number 3 Khalid Sheikh Mohammed at the time of his arrest in Rawalpindi in February 2003.

²⁴ There may be important lessons in this respect in the Iranian revolution of 1979 which rapidly overthrew a dictator overconfident in the fidelity and strength of his military and intelligence services and in the seemingly unconditional support of the United States.

strategy and policy which has centred on the use of military firepower to achieve its objectives in Afghanistan and Pakistan, with insufficient reference to the subtleties and complexities of Pakistani and Afghan societies, and on the West's near unconditional support of Pakistan's military rulers which has profoundly stymied the prospects for democracy, civil society, economic development²⁵, and the rule of law in Pakistan. The failure of Western policy in Afghanistan/Pakistan is now becoming daily more evident. The time is therefore at hand for a rethink which charts a course away from reliance on a military dictator whose policies have singularly failed both the West and the people of Pakistan²⁶.

²⁵ Pakistan has achieved economic growth around 6-8% in recent years thanks in particular to IMF restructuring of the economy and the initiatives of Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz in bringing technocratic economists into positions of influence in Pakistan. However this economic growth does not translate into meaningful development for the ordinary people of Pakistan [cf inflation running at 9% in 2005; chronically low tax-GDP ratio, etc]; moreover Pakistan's economic performance is distorted by vast US aid. See: The World Bank, *Pakistan's Economy in 2006: Performance and Outlook*, December 2006 available at: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/PAKISTANEXTN/Resources/Pak-Economy-Outlook2006.pdf> See also: http://indexmundi.com/pakistan/economy_profile.html

²⁶ "Musharraf does the splits", *The Economist*, 22 February 2007, at http://www.economist.com/displayStory.cfm?story_id=8742940