

Peeling the Waziristan Onion: Central Asians in Armed Islamist Movements in Afghanistan and Pakistan

*Peter Sinnott**

ABSTRACT

The specter of a force of close to five thousand Uzbek Islamic militants throughout the Tribal Areas of North and South Waziristan was presented to a Pakistan senate committee in September 2009 by Senator Muhammad Ibrahim Khan. The history and motivation of the Central Asian forces that have been in Waziristan since their retreat from Taliban-ruled Afghanistan and the fighting at Tora Bora in December 2001 warrants scrutiny. This force to a large degree represents not only the transformation of those who left Uzbekistan and other Muslim regions of the Soviet Union initially for religious reasons into armed militants, but also the transformation of a small number of them into suicide bombers and terrorists clearly aligned with the ideology and goals of Al-Qaida.

Keywords • Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan • Islamic Jihad Group • Islamic Jihad Union • Tohir Yuldash • Waziristan

Introduction

The specter of a force of close to five thousand Uzbek Islamic militants throughout the Tribal Areas of North and South Waziristan was presented to a Pakistan senate committee in September 2009 by Senator Muhammad Ibrahim Khan, while Pakistan Army generals predicted Uzbeks would provide the hardest resistance to an army-led “invasion” of South Waziristan. Prior to the military operations, U.S. drone-based missiles attacked the key leadership of both the Islamic Movement of

* Peter Sinnott, PhD is an independent scholar. He can be contacted at petersinnott@peoplepc.com.

Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) leading to the deaths of both established figureheads. The presence of Uzbek militants who waged armed attacks and bombings against Uzbekistan has come to be seen as a contributing factor in terrorism waged against the Pakistan government and international targets as well. Their seeming sanctuary in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan, a region arguably protecting Al-Qaida's leadership, as well as the base for the Tehrik-e-Islam Taliban, who have been waging a sustained suicide bombing campaign against Pakistan and Afghanistan over the past three years, has begun to be challenged.

The history and motivation of the Central Asian forces that have been in Waziristan since their retreat from Taliban-ruled Afghanistan and the fighting at Tora Bora in December 2001 warrants scrutiny. This force to a large degree represents not only the transformation of those who left Uzbekistan and other Muslim regions of the Soviet Union initially for religious reasons into armed militants, but also the transformation of a small number of them into suicide bombers and terrorists clearly aligned with the ideology and goals of Al-Qaida.

Waziristan now symbolizes the failure of Pakistan to control its own territory. The presumed presence of Osama bin Laden and his most important lieutenant, Ayman al-Zawahiri, in the Tribal Areas adjacent to Pakistan's North West Frontier Province (NWFP) over the past eight years along with an assortment of foreign fighters, especially Uzbeks, renews this region's role as a mountainous frontier that has escaped integration into Pakistan while remaining, as Akbar Ahmed once characterized it, an "encapsulated region."

Waziristan has come to serve as a frontier to both Afghanistan and Pakistan. As a rule a frontier forms between two distinct societies, such as nomadic and sedentary, as was the case for the steppe regions of Central Asia with the oasis-based agriculture and trade societies to the south. This seeming frontier to a 'frontier province' is the result of British as well as Pakistani policy. Just as Russia needed to define its "frontier" in terms of land aggrandizements south and east in the 17-19th centuries, so did Britain's policy on the sub-continent shift from its mainly commercial aims to geopolitical concerns that saw Russia's movements south in Central Asia as threatening to the British government in India. This led to what has come to be known the past century as the "Great Game," which saw a competition for influence, especially over Afghanistan, that has strongly affected the political developments of Central Asia and South Asia to this day. Lord Curzon's

solution was to build what he termed a “Frontier of Separation” between the two empires, rather than a “Frontier of Contact.”¹

After the British captured the Punjab region following the Second Sikh War of 1848–49, access was gained to what is today the frontier province and tribal areas inhabited by the Pushtun and Baluchi, but the British government maintained a policy of a “closed border” with the tribal peoples until the formation of the NWFP in 1901. Integration was not the initial aim in this region; the large Muslim populations of Punjab and Bengal became the critical components of political development in British India, not the Muslim border regions.

Tribal Areas and Curzon

The creation of the NWFP in November 1901, as well as the formation of Political Agencies in Tribal Areas, has been characterized as the “cheapest and most efficient political structure that would permit ultimate control but would not require direct administration of the kind that existed in British India.”² Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, and well-travelled throughout Persia and Russian Central Asia as well, explained his policy succinctly as “the substitution of frontier garrisons drawn from the people themselves, for the costly experiment of large forts and isolated posts thrown forward into a turbulent and fanatical country.”³

Waziristan proved the exception. During the winter of 1919–20, over the course of six months, more than 80,000 British troops were deployed due to an uprising that was partly the consequence of the Third Afghan War as well as fears that Bolshevik consolidation in Central Asia would lead to a renewed Russian thrust south. The British destruction of Kanigurram, the most populated village in South Waziristan and a traditional weapons-making center then and now, put Britain on the path of attempting to control the region by force, garrisoning troops throughout the region.

The case of a sixteen-year old Hindu girl, who fell in love with a Muslim man and subsequently converted and married, which led to the British intervening and returning her to her parents while her husband was charged with her kidnapping, became the spark for a broad revolt. Islam Bibi, as she became popularly known, stated in court that she converted to Islam of her own volition and was legally married, not abducted. Because she was younger than 16 at the time of marriage, she was returned to her parents again and quickly married to a Hindu, but

¹ Ainslee T. Embree (ed.), *Pakistan's Western Borderlands: The Transformation of a Political Order*, (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 1977), p. 26.

² *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

³ Thomas Raleigh (ed.), *Lord Curzon in India, Being a selection from his speeches as Viceroy & Governor-General of India 1898-1905*, (London: MacMillan & Co., 1908), vol. II, p. 416.

the intervention of the British led to the last major popular armed revolt in Waziristan.⁴ The revolt was led by the Faqir of Ippi, as he was popularly known, who raised a lashkar, or peasant militia, of several thousand tribesmen and declared jihad against the British, which led to protracted operations over the years 1936–1938. The Faqir of Ippi was never able to lead the sustained insurrection he desired but spent years of his life digging caves along the Durand Line, the demarcated border with Afghanistan, that later served as refuge for the Mujaheddin during their war with the Soviets as well as for the Taliban and Al-Qaida forces. His actions later even attracted Nazi agents hoping to build an insurrection to draw British troops from other fronts; they sent weapons as well as plans for their local manufacture, which led to nothing. His final stand was against the establishment of Pakistan. His published tracts invoked both Pushtun independence and the depiction of the Pakistan state as a state dominated by Punjabis:

Pakistan is full of faults but is defective for two reasons. One of their main defects is the introduction of man-made laws and the other is the encroachment upon the legal rights of Pushtuns⁵

The view that the establishment of Pakistan by Mohammad Ali Jinnah as a largely secular state for Muslims to live without fear of Hindu or other groups' domination in India is a well-held precept of Pakistan. Still, as the Pakistani state was being launched, Maulana Daududi, the founder of the Jamiat-e-Islami movement that became and remains an important force for an Islamist state, characterized the new nation's leadership as containing "no one who could be credited with an Islamist point of view."⁶ The struggle between the Islamist and secular vision for the Pakistani state continues to this day.

"The violence which preceded partition was grave, widespread and lethal,"⁷ but the fragile state was especially dissatisfied with the borders partition gave to Pakistan. In October 1947, the contested state of Kashmir led to clashes where the Pakistan forces relied heavily on "a force of some 2000 tribesmen from the NWFP" with Mahsuds and Waziris comprising their main element to bolster Pakistan's claim to territory.⁸ During December 1947, the government of Pakistan withdrew its army from the border regions of North and South Waziristan as it

⁴ Syed Mazhar Ali Shah, *Waziristan Tribes*, (Peshawar: Provincial Services Academy, 1991), p. 131.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁶ Khalid bin Sayeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase 1857-1948*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 194.

⁷ Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition*, (Yale University Press, 2007), p. 148.

⁸ Shuja Nawaz, *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, its Army, and the Wars within*, (Karachi: Oxford UP, 2008), pp. 48-49.

bolstered its forces for Kashmir thereby ending, in effect, the long-standing army presence there.

The Soviet-Afghan War and the presidency of Zia-ul-Huq led to the North West Frontier Province and Tribal Areas becoming the hub of training for fighters, not only for Afghan refugees but local Pushtuns as well, while Saudi Arabian money came to enlarge the base of radical madrasahs.

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Jihad Union

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Jihad Union remain the most active symbols of armed resistance to the Karimov regime in Uzbekistan as well as other authoritarian regimes in Central Asia. Both these groups are now largely based in Waziristan and are regarded as terrorist groups internationally. The significance of these movements' threat needs to be reexamined in light of Central Asia's continuing political crises and weak economic conditions.

The emergence of what has come to be seen as radical Islam or political Islam in Central Asia has many roots historically. The transformation of Uzbekistan's Communist Party First Secretary into the "President" of an independent Uzbekistan was accentuated by the simultaneous religious suppression of an emerging independent Islam as much as any independent political movement. The consolidation of political power around President Islam Karimov following the flawed December 1991 presidential election and the emergence of a Civil War in Tajikistan in 1992 that resulted in the formation of a United Tajik Opposition, led to a wide variety of political opponents leaving their homelands. Pakistan and Taliban Afghanistan offered a refuge to those fleeing Central Asia's repressive policies as well as a place for the organization of an armed resistance for national liberation based on militant Islamist principles such as those of the IMU. It also became a center for books and pamphlets that presented views that justified not only their existence in exile, but also their own politicized interpretations of history.

Following the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, orchestrated by Al-Qaida from Afghanistan, the invasion of Afghanistan by U.S. and coalition forces resulted in the death of the former military leader of the IMU, Juma Khodjiev – popularly known as "Juma Namangani" – and a retreat to Pakistan where their cohesion has been jeopardized by several Pakistani Army campaigns. The emergence of the "Islamic Jihad" movement in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan will be examined as an attempt to integrate Central Asians into a different form of Islamist armed resistance. These movements will be

compared on the basis of their actions, organization, goals, and published statements.

Social Conditions and Mobilization

Uzbekistan since the early 1970s underwent a process of population growth that differentiated it and the Central Asian region sharply from the Slavic regions of the Soviet Union, which were below replacement levels. Here high urban population growth rates were surpassed by even higher rural growth rates resulting in ruralization as the percentage of the urban population retreated incrementally annually. Soviet success in some spheres such as literacy, which dwarfed results in social change for neighboring Central Asian societies in western China and Afghanistan, was no longer matched by corresponding success in education as more and more students came to compete for the same amount of seats in higher education institutes. Uzbek-language primary and secondary schools often had reduced hours for students to work at home, if not help in the fields. The result was that neither the economy nor the education system could grow fast enough to secure a level of social mobility commensurate with the population growth.

There was not yet significant out-migration from the large rural economy. Soviet social welfare policies toward large families and the value of Central Asia's many abundant fruits in the marketplaces of Russia contributed to the lowest mobility rates in the Soviet Union. Eastern Ferghana had become the most densely populated part of Central Asia. As the Soviet Union inched towards its implosion in the early 1990s, the lack of a sustainable local economy became more apparent and a large young unemployed population became part of the Soviet Union's legacy to Uzbekistan.

The social mobilization that occurred as a result of the Aral Sea Environmental Movement that began in 1986 in Uzbekistan had a grass roots base in its attempt to use the changing atmosphere of Gorbachev's perestroika to focus on the severe effect increasing cotton irrigation had on the degradation of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya river systems and the rapidly shrinking Aral Sea. There was enough acknowledgement of this environmental disaster by some competing circles within Uzbekistan's ruling elite to allow very open debate in its newspapers of the cotton monoculture and Moscow's policies, which now opened the possibility of diverting part of the Siberian Ob River's flow south through Kazakhstan to Uzbekistan in order to increase the level of irrigated cotton lands even more. The southern Central Asian states had long been directed by Moscow policy toward a cotton plantation economy at the perceived cost of little investment in modernized sectors of the economy long championed ideologically.

The initial large, overflowing crowds in Karakalpakistan in 1986 that heard debates, promoted by environmentalists, on Moscow's role in their deteriorating environmental and health conditions had by 1988 been largely replaced by a different kind of movement. Emphasis shifted to more mobile traveling campaigns, such as "Aral Crisis '88," which traveled throughout the Ferghana Valley – one of the regions of Uzbekistan least environmentally impacted – mobilizing large crowds into what was coalescing into a nationalist flavored movement.

Social mobilization reached another level when, in October 1989, 20,000 demonstrators, most of whom were students, marched through the streets of Tashkent demanding that Uzbek become the state language; the Birlik social movement played a critical role in organizing the demonstrations. In May 1990 an equally large demonstration demanded the removal of the Soviet appointed Islamic religious leader, the Mufti. Abdumannob Polat described this protest as "an unsanctioned five-mile-long rally from Tashkent's main mosques in the city's old town to the city center."⁹ It thus spanned from the neighborhood of one of Uzbekistan's two state controlled madrasahs to the seat of Communist Party power. The state's response by the head of the Council of Ministers only repeated the essence of the Soviet lie, which was that since the state and religion are separate, the government had no role in this. The reaction of the crowd was to call for the resignation of the Communist Party leadership as well.

Clearly the authority of the Communist Party and its self-proclaimed right to not only limit religion, but to monitor and control it was being challenged. Gorbachev's glasnost policy in Central Asia had the effect of bringing up for debate several aspects of the Stalin period in Uzbekistan like the collectivization of agriculture, but many topics such as the purges and the labor camps were not discussed on any level comparable with Russia's well-publicized media discussions. Instead, there was an increasing openness about the discussion of the *jadid* movement in Uzbekistan in the first quarter of the twentieth century. This movement, which sought to bring Central Asia out of its backward slumber of centuries, focused on broadening the education syllabus within the madrasah (thus, the use of "Jadid" from Arabic meaning "new" as in new education approach) and a determination to be part of a larger world. As Abduvakhitov has noted: "Had Central Asian Jadidism of the early 1900s not included political activism, it would have disappeared from the

⁹ Abdumannob Polat, "The Islamic Revival in Uzbekistan: A Threat to Stability?" in Roald Sagdeev and Susan Eisenhower (eds.), *Islam and Central Asia: An Enduring Legacy or an Evolving Threat?* Washington, DC: Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 2000), p. 41.

political and cultural scene as a transient phenomenon.”¹⁰ As its most renowned writers began to be reprinted, it became not only an intellectual legacy, but also the basis for a new nationalism that did not have to divorce itself from its Islamic identity.

The political and religious crisis centered on the role of Islam in Uzbekistan stemming from the Soviet period continues. Its roots lie in the nature of the Bolshevik imposition of power and its initial social and religious policies. The Bolsheviks in Central Asia had neither forces nor party members. Soviet power was achieved essentially by a “Colonial Revolution” where local Russian settlers and forces recognized the Bolshevik leadership though cut off from them by Russia’s civil war. The Central Asian resistance to a second colonial conquest lasted until the late 1920s in some areas and received the denigrating title “Basmachi” or “repressors” by the Soviets. It was actually a large and diverse resistance that included Islamic and nationalist aspects, but not Jadidist. The Soviets always treated the Basmachi as the product of backward Islam and landowners. By the late 1980s their legacy was being reviewed with a few articles even substituting the word “*Qorbashi*” – Central Asians’ term for those who fought Bolshevik rule – in positive affirmation of their resistance.

The suppression of Islam in Central Asia became historically linked by the Soviets to its support among the local resistance to Soviet power in the 1920s and paired with the unveiling of women. This assault on religion and the unveiling of women was a conscious cultural war meant to provide the conditions for their integration into Soviet institutions. Bolshevik campaigns against Islam had initially focused on the destruction of most mosques in the country and the limiting of madrasahs – eventually only two remained in the entire Soviet Union, with both being in Uzbekistan. All lands associated with religion became property of the state, pilgrimage to Mecca or *Hajj* became severely restricted, and all Islamic charitable institutions were banned. The practice of *Shariat* became outlawed and even the call to prayer disappeared in practice.

One result of this was a massive migration from the Ferghana Valley and other parts of Central Asia, variously estimated at 100–250,000 people, mainly to northern Afghanistan, and for some to Saudi Arabia and Turkey where they established émigré communities that to a degree have maintained an identity with Central Asia. All of these migrants from Soviet Central Asia were accepted as *muhajir*, or Muslim religious refugees. Indeed, Shalinsky, interviewing them and their descendents some 50 years later, noted that they continued to see themselves as

¹⁰ Abdujabbar Abduvakhitov, “Islamic Revivalism in Uzbekistan” in Dale F. Eickelman (ed.), *Russia’s Muslim frontiers: New directions in cross-cultural analysis*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 80.

religious migrants.¹¹ The Soviet-Afghan war brought Central Asian conscripts to Afghanistan where not only aspects of their own language, rural life, and culture were very evident, but also where some of the elderly who had migrated from the Soviet Union and their descendents could be encountered.

The institutionalization of Bolshevik power brought with it a policy of militant atheism that was officially taught in every school, and museums of atheism could be found in high schools and every city. The denigration of sacred places was also emphasized such as turning Andijon's large madrasah into a Museum of Atheism with crude paintings of "Atheists in History" on the walls of the former student quarters, the *hujra*. In a Marghilan high school that included Arabic in the curriculum (there was another in Bukhara) there was a museum focused on the theme of linking the liberation of women under the Bolsheviks through unveiling to victory over the backwardness of Islam.

The destruction of the mosque system and the denigration of sacred places forced Islam underground while over time the Soviets developed their system of tightly controlled Islam. "The fact that this parallel Islam existed was because of the repression, but also because this repression was ineffective, at least in the countryside" is a paradox that Olivier Roy has noted.¹² Nevertheless, this parallel Islam was effectively cut off from the world of Dar ul-Islam. The later Soviet period saw the best educated Imams in the Soviet religious system enjoy study abroad in those Arabic countries with which the Soviet Union had good relations as the wall between underground Islam and official Islam narrowed slightly.

An overarching struggle for authority in Islam and in the political sphere began in the late 1980s in Uzbekistan. It was not just the impediments to public prayer and religious studies that affected Islam severely, it was the policy of limiting mosques and institutions of Islamic education that the public increasingly was overturning that was rapidly transforming Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the early 1990s.

Pakistan sought to take advantage of this situation on many levels. Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the military intelligence branch most involved in the support and training of the Mujahideen for the Soviet-Afghan War began new initiatives with the demise of the Soviet Union. According to General Javed Ashraf Qazi, the newly appointed director of the ISI in 1993, he was shown "the 'strong room' that once had 'currency stacked to the ceiling' but was now empty as adventurist ISI officers had taken 'suitcases filled with cash' to the field, including to the newly

¹¹ Audrey C. Shalinsky, "Islam and Ethnicity: The Northern Afghanistan Perspective," *Central Asian Survey* 1, 2/3 (1982), p. 71-83.

¹² Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia*, (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 151.

independent Central Asian States, ostensibly to set up safe houses and operations there in support of Islamic causes.”¹³ According to Anatoli Beloyusov, a KGB deputy director, “the strengthened influence of the ideas of Islamic fundamentalism [in Tajikistan] was directly linked to increased activities by Pakistani special services,” which he linked to program “M” – an operation of Pakistan. He further stated that “some schools have been set up in Afghan settlements near the border to give religious and military instruction to young Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Turkmens.”¹⁴ Reports of Soviet border and KGB troops capturing “dozens of Soviet Uzbeks and Tajiks trying to cross into Afghanistan to join the Mujahideen for training” circulated.¹⁵ The question that cannot be completely answered as of yet is to what degree was there a pre-existing organized Central Asian armed force already in place in the early 1990s?

The Significance of December 9, 1991

The emergence of what has come to be termed radical Islam or political Islam in Central Asia has many roots. The vacuum of knowledge of Islam by the majority of the population and their strong desire to rebuild their cultural heritage after 70 years of Soviet policies resulted in thousands of mosques being built by poor communities within the space of a few years in the 1990s. The lack of qualified Imams compounded the situation and thousands of Central Asians ventured to Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia to study. Few could afford to stay long, and Pakistan and Saudi Arabia took on special roles because their madrasahs were willing to provide room and board.

Foreign Islamists were able to take a prominent role early on because of their financial backing and greater knowledge of the Islamic world outside the Soviet Union because few Central Asian Muslims had participated in Hajj, let alone studied in a madrasah abroad. By 1990 foreign influences began to challenge the long insulated world of Soviet Islam as missionaries from Saudi Arabia and Pakistan appeared throughout Central Asia. The building of mosques and various levels of Islamic schools suddenly flourished while the rest of the dying Soviet system shirked investment in education. Central Asia was suddenly becoming a place of competing voices for authority in Islam and government.

In the early 1980s there were only three mosques functioning in Namangan, a city of more than 22,000, while “before 1917 there were 360

¹³ Shuja Nawaz, *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, its Army, and the Wars within*, op. cit., p. 468.

¹⁴ Martin, Ebon, *KGB: death and rebirth*, (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1994), p. 161-162.

¹⁵ Afzal Mahmood, “Unrest amongst Soviet Muslims,” *Dawn*, February 26, 1990.

mosques and 2 madrasahs in Namangan.”¹⁶ Islamic activists in Namangan began a series of protests to recover sacred space. They focused on one of the strongest symbols of Soviet denigration of Islam, the Gumbaz Mosque, which was being used as a warehouse for the state wine factory and contained large vats of wine. When a meeting was planned for the site, many involved were arrested, but released as they planned a hunger strike to gain more attention. Within a short period the vestiges of the wine warehouse disappeared and it reverted to a place of prayer.¹⁷

Uzbekistan outlawed demonstrations on the streets in 1991, and any mention of rallies and demonstrations disappeared from Uzbekistan’s press. An article in the Russian newspaper *Kuranty* noted that Uzbekistan’s press had “ignored recent rallies of Muslim believers in the Uzbekistan cities of Andijon and Namangan, while the authorities have denied that any rallies took place at all.”¹⁸ Large meetings did in fact take place, not on the streets, but in several mosques, with the largest estimated at some 20,000, and were organized by the Islamic Renaissance Party, which was trying to get registered as a political party. The Islamic Renaissance Party had held its initial organizing conference in Tashkent in January, but the authorities had disrupted it.

The emergence of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan has its inception in part due to the failure of the December 9, 1991 debates between President Karimov and Tahir Yoldash and other Islamists to result in a realized compromise. The removal of four Imams from a list of 100 people considered politically important enough to meet Islam Karimov, who had been the CPSU First Secretary for Uzbekistan, and was now “campaigning” for the presidency while being the acting president, led not only to protest later that day, December 8, 1991, but to the seizure of the former Communist Party headquarters in Namangan by protesters in support of the disinvited Imams.

The result, the next day, was the return of Islam Karimov and an open debate on issues raised by the primary spokesman for the four Imams, Tahir Yoldash, then 23 years old, that took place on a square within the building with thousands in attendance, nearly all male and thousands more outside listening through loudspeakers. The issues raised were as follows: Why was the political registration of the Islamic Renaissance party as well as other parties, such as Birlik, denied? Why not postpone the election until there is time for more candidates to be heard? What is the relationship between the state and Islam? Will there be a new constitution that will follow debate on such an issue?

¹⁶ Abdujabbar Abduvakhitov, “Islamic Revivalism in Uzbekistan,” *op. cit.* p. 88.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ I. Chantseva, *Kuranty*, October 21, 1991.

Immediately following the public debate Karimov met privately with Yoldash and other prominent Islamic activists for nearly an hour and promised several times that the Islamic Renaissance Party of Uzbekistan would be registered within a month of the election.

The declaration by some Islamists later that Namangan was an independent Islamic emirate, and attempts to provide private policing of the city that included criticism of women if not deemed appropriately dressed, led to a deterioration in relations with the Karimov regime and the departure of Yoldash and some hundreds of supporters to Tajikistan and, ultimately, Afghanistan and Pakistan to escape arrest. The era of open discussions and demonstrations had ended for Uzbekistan and steps toward armed conflict had begun.

Profile of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan

Two generations of Islamist Uzbeks now reside in Pakistan. Many came for Islamic study and have stayed because it would be politically difficult to return. Some of the more radical madrasahs began to feed students into paramilitary training camps in the 1980s.

The Central Asian presence in the North West Frontier Province and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas was initially related to the Soviet Afghan war, as many deserters and prisoners-of-war were given the option of becoming Muslims and soon began to attend local madrasahs. For those of Central Asian or North Caucasus background this was an opportunity to develop their religion on a level that was simply impossible in the Soviet Union. The Deobandi madrasahs of Samiul Huq became the most significant. Jama'at-e-Islami, Maulana Dawdudi's movement, as well as Jama'at-e-Ulema Islami (JUI), gave significant help in this as well. Other radical madrasahs too, while less comprehensive, simply became feeders for paramilitary training camps. These training camps in the 1980s were evolving toward a system where basic arms training was accompanied by an ideological emphasis, which placed jihad and martyrdom at the center of Islam. This first step entailed a 21-day training course, and could be followed by a special course or series of courses with more depth in weapons use, tactics, and explosives that could last from three to six months.¹⁹ Over time both the training camps and madrasahs adapted to the needs of their students and recruits by producing syllabi in Russian and Soviet Uzbek and, presumably, other languages of the Muslim peoples of the Soviet Union. The nexus of funds from Saudi Arabian and Turkish Islamist organizations and the political will of Pakistan via its Inter-Services Intelligence, as well as the coalescing support of Turkistani émigré organizations, gave birth to armed groups that participated in incursions

¹⁹ Ayesha Siddiqi, "Terror's Training Ground," *Newsline*, September 2009, p. 23.

into Tajikistan in March 1987 and Uzbekistan in April 1987 – which marked the first attempt since the distant Basmachi of the 1920s to attack the Soviet Union in Central Asia. The training of Soviet Central Asians and other Muslim peoples did not end with either the Soviet-Afghan War or the demise of the Soviet Union. Several training camps formed in the tribal areas of Pakistan, such as Miramshah in North Waziristan, were utilized by Uzbeks and Chechens in the late 1980s and 1990s.²⁰

The arrival of Juma Namangani and Tahir Yuldash in Pakistan led to the formal establishment of the IMU as an armed Islamic group in Peshawar in 1996. Their strong formal military organization was attractive to Taliban Afghanistan, which allowed them to have a base for operations into Central Asia, as well as take on a conventional military role against Ahmed Shah Masud's forces. Other factors, such as the ethnic kinship of most members of the IMU to the Central Asian peoples predominant in northern Afghanistan contributed to their greater acceptance there than the Taliban and partially transformed them into the Taliban's army in northern Afghanistan.

The IMU distinguished itself from other groups trained in Pakistan and Afghanistan paramilitary camps in that it planned to act on a military unit basis headed by field commanders. The plan envisaged the latter leading their men in attacks designed to "liberate" Uzbekistan by militarily defeating border guards and small units of the Uzbekistan army, and in thus doing, trigger a popular revolt.

For instance, there was an emphasis on testing a recruit's mental maps of his own village or town.²¹ The challenge to know where the militia station was, where the Karimov party headquarters were located, as well as government buildings, forced a recruit to think in terms of infrastructure. The IMU certainly had a component that was a conventional army headed by field commanders who had progressed through a series of military courses. Formal aspects such as taking an oath to "fight to the last drop of blood" and the immersion into different sequences of military courses were all designed to build self-confidence as well as the ability to work both on a unit and individual level. Typical of their design was to have three levels of training in a subject up to the level of instructor. A field commander's course meant completing three levels of light weapons mastery as well as small unit tactics. These courses were mainly derived from U.S. and Soviet training manuals.

²⁰ Abdujabbar Abduvakhitov, *Mezhdunarodnyi Terrorizm, Ekstremizm: Poniatie, Istoriia i Sovremennost'*, CD [International Terrorism: Concepts, History and the Current Situation], (Tashkent: Academy of State and Social Construction under the President of Uzbekistan, 2003).

²¹ This paragraph is based on my experience translating materials brought from Afghanistan by New York Times reporters Chris Chivers and David Rohde. Much of this material is presented in *The New York Times*, March 17-18, 2002.

Explosives school had a three-level intricate course, which was clearly focused on the destruction of infrastructure – buildings, bridges, etc. Poisons, Stalking, and Assassinations schools involved training that could easily lend itself to terrorism scenarios.

Clearly, there were also Central Asians trained in paramilitary camps in Afghanistan who were never incorporated into the IMU but were infiltrated back into Central Asia. This was also fundamental to the IMU's strategy of eventually being able to coordinate uprisings involving local situations with an invasion of more conventional forces. Consequently, the IMU's 'Order of Battle' was organized around the concept of a field commander for every province or viloyat in Uzbekistan as well as for part of Ferghana in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Every viloyat would also have an "amir" who would have leadership and religious qualifications to be respected locally. The combination of field commanders and local infiltrated combatants was expected to serve as the backbone to any uprising.

Waziristan

The ranks of those affiliated with the IMU that came to Pakistan as part of the retreat from Afghanistan in late 2001, including those who have come back independently in the past seven years, have been severely depleted by the continuing attacks of U.S. and Pakistan army forces as part of operations to not only defend southern Afghanistan from renewed Taliban attacks, but also to target Al-Qaida strongholds in the tribal areas. Initially, the IMU was able to maintain substantial clustered concentrations and unit integrity under field commanders in Waziristan that allowed them a great deal of contact with each other

The IMU's role in Pakistan from 2002–5 can be interpreted as serving as a blocking agent for Taliban and Al-Qaida forces to Pakistani military operations that were attempting to gain control of the tribal areas. In March 2004 they fought several pitched battles against the Pakistani Army that resulted in substantial Pakistani Army casualties. Their fighting when surrounded by Pakistani Army units was captured partially in a video, which showed them fighting in burial shrouds. Their escape was thanks to their support from Nek Muhammad, a local Warzai Waziri commander who used his own armor-plated jeep to get a wounded Tahir Yoldash to safety. The killing of Nek Muhammad later that summer by a U.S. drone removed some of the visible support that the IMU had locally. Their subsequent alliances with Waziri Taliban commanders deteriorated substantially over the next two years as Pakistan initiated a policy that advocated the removal of foreigners and ending their alliances with local Pushtun groups, with the result that Uzbeks were targeted to leave. A Waziri Taliban commander, Mullah

Muhammad Nazir, affiliated with Afghan Taliban leader Jalaluddin Haqqani, initially supported their sanctuary, but turned vehemently against the IMU in 2006 and began a campaign to drive Uzbeks out of tribal areas “because they refused to fight in Afghanistan.”²²

It also resulted in their shift to Mehsudi sponsored support and their greater fragmentation into smaller clusters of fighters. While their fighting had prevented deeper Pakistani Army penetration and safeguarded many Islamist armed groups and Taliban forces, the ability of IMU forces to operate freely in South Waziristan sharply declined.. .

The surviving few hundred IMU members in Pakistan today lack the clustered concentrations that gave them cohesion. The IMU is now divided among smaller units and often found with other foreigners. Does all this dispersion of forces point to U.S. and Pakistan policy success, or, the rising role of Al-Qaida in building its international terrorist groups? The goals of Al-Qaida have consistently been to serve as a diffusion agent for international jihad. Its main focus in recent years has been to build distinct groups that carryout terrorist activity in designated countries.

As the Waziristan-based Tehrek-i-Taliban have brought their campaign of armed attacks and suicide bombings from the tribal areas against Afghanistan and the Pakistan government , it has also been accompanied by an increased use of more conventional troops, often of an international background as well. In short, there is greater use of international jihad participants by groups affiliated with Al-Qaida networks in operations waged against Afghanistan and the Pakistan Army from the tribal areas of Pakistan.

The IMU became an armed movement not only associated with seeking the liberation of Uzbekistan on an Islamic basis, but with broader Central Asia, as every state acquired most of the oppressive policies toward Islam associated with Uzbekistan. It also became clearly associated with terrorist activities, such as the kidnapping of Japanese geologists in 1999 and American trekkers in 2000 in the Ferghana Valley. There are many stories from government militia members in Termez, and from various citizens of Uzbekistan that crossed paths with them in the mountains, that lend an individual aspect to the terror endured. When the IMU was able to infiltrate forces into Uzbekistan, it never prompted the public support anticipated. With the goal of overthrowing a dictator thwarted, the mission has changed because they are increasingly dependent on the most radical forces in Waziristan to stay there, as clearly there is no sanctuary elsewhere.

²² Carlotta Gall, *New York Times*, April 21, 2007.

Islamic Jihad Group/Union

The formation of the Islamic Jihad Group and its emphasis on suicide bombers as a means of punishing the Karimov regime represents a dramatic change in tactics and strategy. This stems, perhaps, from the realization that the IMU could no longer field enough troops at any point to infiltrate a force capable of fighting Karimov's forces. The last such IMU significant infiltration in August 2000 was quite successful in that it got a unit of more than 100 well-armed fighters into Uzbekistan following successful border area skirmishes, only to be later caught in a box canyon where most of the unit were killed, while other units along the Uzbekistan Ferghana border engaged militarily but failed to infiltrate. Since then the idea of either controlling a significant piece of territory or even being able to infiltrate significant forces has nearly vanished. There is also the reality that these military operations failed to engender enough public support or sufficient number of infiltrated combatants to contribute to the large scale of operations envisioned.

The Islamic Jihad Group was originally organized by Najmiddin Jalolov, also known as "Ebu Yahya Muhammad Fatih," and Suhayl Buranov in North Waziristan in 2002, following the completion of the IMU withdrawal from the Tora-Bora fighting.²³ They were members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, but formed this separate wing because Tahir Yoldash was no longer seen as an active member in resistance to the Karimov regime since there had been no new attacks in Uzbekistan, as recounted by Nartbay Dutbayev, then Chairman of Kazakhstan's Committee for National Security in a 2005 interview.²⁴ Another explanation for the group's emergence could be the decision by the Al-Qaida leadership in May 2001 to remove Juma Namangani from his role as military commander of the IMU and assign him to head "a brigade of foreign guerillas called Livo that encompassed Uzbeks, Turks, Uighurs, Pakistanis and some Arabs,"²⁵ who were largely destroyed by American forces in November 2001. It would be strange if many of Namangani's closest commanders and soldiers did not follow him into this new organization.

By the fall of 2003 Islamic Jihad had organized an operation for Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan designed to build a coterie of suicide bombers to be recruited locally. They sent two "amirs" named Ahmed

²³ U.S. Treasury Department, "Treasury Designates Leadership of the IJU Terrorist Group," June 18, 2008.

²⁴ I met with Nartbay Dutbayev in Almaty as part of a Central Asia Project delegation from the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, May 2005.

²⁵ Peter Baker, "Renewed Militancy Seen in Uzbekistan," *Washington Post*, September 28, 2003.

Bek Mirzoev and Zhakhsi Bi Mirzoev, who were not related, to carry out operations in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Both were Uzbek, but Bi Mirzoev was a Kazakh citizen. Other support people were trained but the critical factor was the use of local networks to obtain housing. Both men had charismatic personalities that allowed them to attract and recruit women of college-age as well as middle-aged to carry out attacks in both Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

In Tashkent, the young woman who threw herself upon a group of policeman at the Chor-Su Bazaar, and a middle-aged woman who chased a policeman to blow herself up were some of the most poignant scenes enacted in late March 2004. The final wave of bombers that struck in July in Tashkent targeted first the Prosecutor-General's Office and then the U.S. and Israeli consulates. The total of 47 killed in Tashkent and Bukhara attest to the group's impact on one level, but there was no mass popular support. The targeting of the July attacks was meant to coincide with trials of supporters arrested after the first wave of bombings. The selection of the U.S. and Israeli missions signaled that this group was targeting the main enemies of international jihad rather than additional Uzbek targets.

It is interesting to note that the Islamic Jihad Group stands out in its demand for media attention and desire to take responsibility for attacks. Several websites refused to publish their "communiqué" following the first series of suicide bombings in the spring of 2004. Finally, the editor of the website StopDictatorKarimov included it:²⁶

We sent our communiqué [*bayonat* in Uzbek] to several sites with the request that they announce it. Dear brother, do you know for what reason no one has announced our communiqué?...Islamic Jihad is a group of Muslim Fighters for the Faith (*Mujahid*) who take responsibility upon themselves for the attacks and bombings carried out in the "Uzbekistan" homeland against the "Uzbekistan" government and its hirelings that have strongly tyrannized Uzbekistan's people.²⁷

A few days later the same website received another short missive promising that "documentary films have been made, but they are very far

²⁶ Hazratqul Hudoiberdi, the editor of the website stopdictatorkarimov.com, explained: "Having absolutely no information on this group, I have nevertheless published this letter in the hope that it will to some measure throw light upon the events of recent days in Uzbekistan."

²⁷ "Islamiyy Jihad" gurukhi ma'suliatni o'z bo'yiniga oldi! ["Islamic Jihad" group claims responsibility]," April 3, 2004, <www.stopdictatorkarimov.com> (August 4, 2004).

from us now and we cannot give this thing to you quickly...”²⁸ This need to focus on the recording of an event by email and video has become characteristic of this group. Again announcing their next series of bombings in Tashkent in July 2004 that were timed to coincide with the trial of those affiliated with the spring events, they not only described them as “necessary executions against Jews and Christians, the enemies of Islam...” but wanted the announcement of their actions by email to “serve as a document that the group of amirs informed us of this before the attacks.”²⁹ Seeking such a relationship with websites and media, where they are put in the role of serving as a “timestamp,” is another indicator that the group measures its success in terms of publicity.

The scenario for Kazakhstan was never played out, according to Nartbai Dutbayev, and sixteen members were caught, mostly women, several of whom were mothers. “They were so full of their ideas and committed to their cause in just eighteen months doctrination,” he said. They believe, he noted, that “if they can eliminate Karimov, Islamic believers will support them.”

A series of additional attacks in Pakistan spanning the first half of 2004 were linked to eight captured men that were described by the interior minister as being of Central Asian origin and belonging to a group called “Jundullah” that was linked to training in Waziristan.³⁰ This group name also turned up on videos of jihad fighters in Pakistan largely from the former Soviet Union and Turkey, some of whom also turned up in IMU films as well. A Turkman explosives trainer linked to Islamic Jihad Group arrested in August 2004 admitted that his trainees included Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Turkmen and Tajiks.³¹

Even the planning of the suicide bombing outside the U.S. consulate in Karachi in March 2006 was linked to Uzbeks affiliated with Al Qaida according to Pakistan security officials.³²

Additional events, which targeted Germany in 2007 and Turkey in April 2009 but which were thwarted, have also demonstrated a need to focus on international targets combined with a broad use of video and media announcements. In September 2007, a few days before the anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, two Germans and a Turk were arrested as they began to mix a 1,500-pound hydrogen peroxide based explosive. The planned attacks on Germany represented a departure from the previously Uzbekistan-centric nature of

²⁸ “Islamiyy Jihaddan navbatdagi maktub! [Latest letter from Islamic Jihad],” July 5, 2004, <www.stopdictatorkarimov.com> (August 4 2004).

²⁹ “Islamiyy Jihad gurukhining shoshilinch bayonoti [Islamic Jihad group’s urgent message],” July 30, 2004, <www.stopdictatorkarimov.com> (August 4 2004).

³⁰ “8 linked to Al Qaeda arrested,” *Dawn*, June 14, 2004.

³¹ Ismail Khan “Turkman trainer held in NWFP,” *Dawn*, August 11, 2006.

³² “Al Qaeda was behind attack on American consulate,” *Dawn*, July 27, 2006.

this group. The focus on Germany clouds the Uzbek aspect of the movement first emphasized. A video appeared in May 2008 centered on a German convert to Islam who explained that Germany was a target because “the Germans are directly involved in the war which is taking place in Afghanistan.”³³

Additional video targeting Germans appeared in September 2008 under the IMU banner with Tahir Yoldash (appearing as “Muhammad Tahir Farooq”) voiced over in German advocating: “Come and join the ranks of the Mujahideen and fill in the gaps of the already fallen martyrs.”³⁴ Along with a German and two Moroccans who grew up in Germany and could speak German, one clearly received the impression that the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan had become nearly indistinguishable from the Islamic Jihad. One of the German speakers from Morocco in the video even promised that you can bring your families (to Waziristan presumably) and they will be well taken care of some distance from the front, which adds a surreal element to the already prodigious videos and slide shows that continually present smiling, well-scrubbed jihadis in clean camouflage uniforms carrying weapons, accompanied by captions that emphasize their diverse ethnic backgrounds.

The thwarted attacks that were planned in Turkey yielded 37 arrests on April 20, 2009, throughout Turkey, including two Uzbeks. Turkish police described the group as being members of Islamic Jihad and planning attacks on NATO facilities.

Islamic Jihad’s shooting of its way through a police checkpoint at Khanabad close to the Kyrgyzstan border on May 25–26, 2009, as well as its carrying out of attacks on two buildings in the city that symbolized much of their hatred for the Karimov regime, the National Security Service and Internal Affairs buildings, followed by a suicide bombing in Andijon near a café frequented by security personnel, resulted in relatively few official casualties. But the ensuing transportation paralysis and communications blocking of cell phones locally as well as Russian cable news reports of the incidents had an impact.³⁵ As expected, email announcements from Islamic Jihad claiming responsibility³⁶ ensued as did a video announcement from its website.³⁷

³³ See the video on <www.nefafoundation.org>.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Aleksei Volosevich “Uzbekistan 2009: ‘Islamskii dzhikhad’, ‘seryii import’, zakrytye granitsy i tainye sudebnye protsessy [Uzbekistan 2009: ‘Islamic Jihad.’ ‘grey import,’ closed borders and secret judicial processes],” *Ferghana.ru*, October 10, 2009, <<http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=6328>>, (January 10 2010).

³⁶ “Little-known Islamic Jihad claims responsibility for Hanabad explosion,” May 28, 2009, <http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=en&cid=8&nid=10496>, (January 10 2010).

³⁷ <www.sehadetzamani.com> June 3, 2009 (January 10 2010).

The deaths from U.S. drone attacks of Jalolov last summer as well as the death of Yoldash later from wounds removes the most long-lasting Uzbek militant leadership associated with the Taliban and Al-Qaida. It can be expected that Tahir Yoldash will be replaced, but no one has the historical sense and longevity that he possessed because of his prominent role in challenging Karimov in debate publicly in December 1991.

Conclusion

I believe that it has proven unsustainable for the IMU in Waziristan to maintain their former cohesion because Pakistani and U.S. operations since 2002 have both pushed them back and killed their most significant leaders. They have certainly lost hundreds of troops and several commanders since they came to Pakistan and lost dozens in Tajikistan who have been captured in recent years. The patronage conditions that allowed them to find sanctuary have been dramatically curtailed. New recruits continue to journey southwards, according to Major General Bozhko of Kazakhstan's Committee on National Security, though in lesser numbers and via a more circuitous route through Iranian Caspian ports and overland routes that bring them to porous Afghan and Pakistani borders.³⁸ The rise of Islamic Jihad reflects the integration of fighters once committed to the armed liberation of Uzbekistan and the removal of President Karimov into a movement whose agenda is increasingly indistinguishable from that of Al-Qaida.

June 2009 marked two decades in power for Islam Karimov. In this time, substantial numbers of men who cannot find employment in Uzbekistan have gone to work abroad; freedom of the press, assembly, and religion remain only slight memories. The Karimov regime's use of force in Andijon in May 2005 remains a reminder that there can be no large demonstrations.

Antipathy toward the Karimov regime is clear, but it is also clear that the IMU networks that were once even quite visible in parts of Uzbekistan no longer have much potency. The idea of building a large armed Islamist force abroad that will liberate Uzbekistan can no longer be taken seriously. Its replacement by a philosophy centered on suicide bombings that target Uzbekistan power organs as well as international targets closely aligned with the goals of Al Qaida or Tehrik-e-Taliban represents not so much an alternative strategy as an affirmation of terror and revenge as the basis of policy. Still, the resentment felt by those suppressed in their religion runs high, and clearly Islamic religiosity has risen greatly over the past twenty years. The challenges that remain are the same that Islam Karimov faced on December 9, 1991: will free

³⁸ I met with Vladimir Bozhko in Almaty as part of a Central Asia Project delegation from the National Committee on American Foreign Policy delegation in June 2006.

elections be allowed with parties representing a broad range of interests, including Islamists? Will there be a constitutional congress that will allow discussion of the relationship of Islam and the state? The role of the police organs and prosecutor-general's office as part of the Karimov legacy of political suppression is sure to be on the agenda as well.

Waziristan, where both the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Islamic Jihad have been located, is a region that did not begin to have roads built until the late 1960s and radio broadcast signals (FM) could not be received until the latter half of 2004. The region has come to epitomize the remoteness of the Pakistan government to one of its provinces. The lack of Pakistan territoriality in the region owes much to the British heritage of using remote frontier posts as a symbol of governance with agency headquarters in each of the tribal areas of the North West Frontier Province serving as the closest resemblance to market towns for decades. Hassan Abbas recently wrote that, "there is an emerging consensus among foreign policy experts that the growing insurgency and militancy in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) poses the greatest security challenge not only to Pakistan and Afghanistan, but also to the United States."³⁹ The result has been a military invasion by the Pakistani Army that remains incomplete. If the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Jihad Union are finally forced from Pakistan, it can be expected that another form of armed movement will emerge until Uzbekistan creates conditions that reconcile political and religious freedom.

³⁹ Hassan Abbas, "President Obama's Policy Options in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)," Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, 2009.