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The War in Mali: Islamists, Tuaregs and French Intervention

By Ahmed S. Hashim

In January 2013, the French government of President Francois Hollande found itself involved in an increasingly complicated war against Islamist militants and Tuareg separatists in the remote and dusty country of Mali, a former French colonial possession and one of the poorest countries on the African continent. This intervention – codenamed Operation Serval – came at the culmination of a long chain of events in that hapless country whose current situation is characterized by political instability, economic stagnation and longstanding Tuareg separatist sentiment in the north and Islamist extremist infiltration via porous and poorly-guarded borders.

Mali and the Sahel Region

Mali is in what is referred to as the Sahel, a desolate and forbidding region in the middle of the Sahara desert. Although there is some ongoing debate concerning the geographical extent of the Sahel region, it is generally considered to extend from the Western Sahara – a territory whose sovereignty is at issue – on the Atlantic to the Horn of Africa on the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea. Specifically, it includes the following states: Western Sahara, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Sudan (North), Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somaliland and Somalia. The Sahel countries are among the world's poorest, and the region overall is racked by drought and food shortages. It is also host to some of the world's busiest smuggling routes. People, weapons and South Ameri-

can drugs pass through this vast and virtually unpoliced desert expanse.

The Sahel region separates the Arab-dominated nations of North Africa (which also contain a large ethnic group known as Amazigh or Berbers) from those of sub-Saharan Africa. In the minds of nineteenth century Orientalists the Semitic (Arab) and Hamitic (Amazigh) constituted the native "whites" of Africa whose relations with the "black" Africans were marred by manifestations of racial superiority on the part of the former, mutual suspicions and hatreds, and by the practice of taking blacks as slaves by Arab and Berber tribes. These mutual racial prejudices have been carried into contemporary times. Immediately below the Sahel nations are the more prosperous – but also conflict-ridden nations (e.g. Nigeria) of West Afri-



Map of the Sahel region.

Source: Qantara

http://en.qantara.de/files/6973/6874/4b59cb6097ea6_Map_Sahel.jpg

ca. What happens in the Sahel is not limited to the Sahel as events there – often themselves a consequence of disruption in North Africa (e.g. the Libyan Revolution of 2011 against Colonel Gaddafi sent thousands of Africans back into the Sahel) and witnessed the flooding of the Sahel with Libyan arms that are more advanced than those already in that region.

What of Mali itself? In the late 19th century, France imposed its control over most of West Africa and in the process supplanting and often destroying by military force quite sophisticated local empires or states; they then set about establishing modern borders for their possessions. The Mali which emerged from French colonialism in 1960 nonetheless inherited a very large land area that was over twice the size of modern France. Modern Mali is a poor, landlocked nation of almost 15 million people in the western part of the Sahel. Its population is composed largely of black Africans who live in the more

fertile southern region of the country, which also includes the capital, Bamako. The northern desert region which includes the historically important Islamic centre of learning, Timbuktu, is home to nomadic Arab tribes and another nomadic people called Tuaregs (they prefer to call themselves Kel Tamasheq). The Tuaregs are a sub-branch of the Amazigh peoples who were already there when the Arabs arrived to claim the region for Islam. The Arabs and Tuaregs of Mali constitute somewhere between 10-15% of the total population. The overwhelming majority of Malians are Muslims (90%). The differences in Mali were not religious, but between the poorer and neglected Tuareg and Arab-inhabited north and the more fertile black African southern part of the country. For much of Mali's modern history as an independent nation, there was no religious strife or manifestations of extremism; but there were signs of Tuareg and Arab separatist sentiment from the very beginning of the founding of Mali.



Political map of Mali

Source: Maps of the World

<http://www.mapsofworld.com/mali/mali-political-map.html>

Tuareg Rebellions, 1963-Present

When France granted Mali independence in 1960, the northerners were chagrined that the colonial power had chosen to include them with in a country politically dominated by an "African" government in Bamako far away in the south. Many in the ethnically distinct north of Mali (along with some in southern Algeria and northern Niger) expected an independent Tuareg, Berber, and Arab nation to be formed by the Sahara desert regions when French rule ended. The Tuareg rebellion of 1962–1964, sometimes called the First Tuareg Rebellion or the Al-fellaga, was a short-lived and amateurish insurgency by disgruntled Tuareg elements against the socialist government of Modibo Keita which was dominated by southerners. No more than 1,500 poorly-armed anti-government fighters were ever active, but the ferocious response of the Malian Armed Forces resulted in a refugee crisis, as thousands fled to Algeria. The subsequent military occupation of the northern region, the torture and extra-judicial killings of rebels led to deep resentment among the northerners.

Northern disgruntlement was accentuated by socio-economic marginalization in a country whose rigid socialist policies led to increased poverty and then bankruptcy by the end of the 1960s. Keita turned to the West (particularly France) for economic assistance. However, in 1968, before Keita's new direction bore any fruit, his regime was overthrown by a group of young army officers led by Lieutenant (later General) Moussa Traore, who expected the West to help Mali recover. However, little foreign direct investment made its way to Mali and the country was unable to develop worthy national infrastructure. Much of the national budget was eaten up by a huge and corrupt public sector that had been inherited from the days of socialism. Meanwhile, birth rates remained high, and Mali was unable to provide meaningful employment to its expanding population. The northern region suffered more than the southern region as Tu-

regs and Arabs were under-represented in the government and public sector. What little existed in the way of public funds was spent in the south. An economically and politically vulnerable Mali faced a second Tuareg rebellion. By 1991, alienated by years of discrimination and by massacres in Mali and Niger, Tuaregs in both countries rebelled. A year later, the Malian Army launched bloody reprisals against civilians after Tuareg rebel attacks on the city of Gao.

In the latest rebellion which erupted in January 2012 after months of preparation, the rebels organised themselves under the banner of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), an organization which was founded at the end of 2011 as a result of the fusion of disparate rebel groups. Its emergence has been spurred by the return of thousands of well-armed and experienced Tuareg from fighting for the late Muammar Gaddafi in Libya. In the past, many destitute Tuareg men fled to Libya and joined the Libyan army where they received relatively good training, housing, and good salaries. They participated in Qaddafi's foolhardy and losing wars in sub-Saharan Africa; nonetheless, these adventures provided them with considerable combat experience. These men constituted the core of the MNLA fighting units and were under the command Mohammed Ag Najm, a former officer in Gaddafi's army. The MNLA is led by secretary general Bilal Ag Acherif and head of the political wing is Mahmoud Ag Aghali. The MNLA leaders say they want a free, independent and secular state, which they call Azawad.

The combat units of the MNLA proved to be better and more motivated fighters than the Malian soldiers. Mali's regular army consists of approximately 7,500 personnel - mostly mobile infantry supported by some Special Forces, approximately 4,000 paramilitary and northern pro-government militia groups that were frequently relied upon by Bamako to supplement its efforts. Despite a historical need for rapid and mobile

force projection into the remote desert north from the southern power base, the Malian government's military infrastructure in the region consisted largely of small garrisons connected by poorly maintained roads, with larger bases maintained at the three regional capitals bearing the names of the administrative areas they represent: Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu. The garrison mentality of the Malian military was reinforced by the lack of an air support capability. This serious gap in capabilities prevented the Malian military from conducting adequate aerial reconnaissance to locate rebel forces and from being able to take the fight to the rebels. Transport helicopters and helicopter gunships would have constituted a formidable force-multiplier; but the Malian Air Force simply did not have the wherewithal to build and sustain an adequate fleet of helicopters. The sheer size of the region created a network of vulnerable supply lines, forcing Bamako to resupply its soldiers by means of vulnerable convoys through the desert or through piecemeal air drops by its tiny air force which consists mainly of barely serviceable transport planes.

Bamako's war effort in the north became increasingly undermined by the rapid fall of government-controlled garrisons to fast moving rebel forces. These undermanned outposts were distant from one another and thus could not mutually reinforce each other when they came under attack. Moreover, these garrisons were short of supplies, food and ammunition due to the appalling logistics incapacity of the Malian army. The humiliating defeats and grievous casualty levels – including massacres of unarmed soldiers – set the stage for a political show-down in Bamako where junior officers under the leadership of Captain Amadou Sanogo executed a coup d'état on 22 March 2012, overthrowing the democratic government of Amadou Toumani Toure (popularly known as "ATT"). Styling themselves the National Committee for the Return of Democracy and the Restoration of the State (Comité National pour le Redressement de la

Démocratie et la Restauration de l'État: CNRDR). The committee denounced the President's incompetence and promised to "hand power back to a democratically elected President as soon as the country is reunified and its integrity is no longer threatened." But the emergence of a military government in Bamako actually worsened the situation for the Malian military effort in the north. Taking advantage of the turmoil and paralysis in the military high command and of the orders by the new government for troops to retreat to more defensible lines, the rebels swept to victory in an astonishing 72 hours after the coup, taking all three northern provincial capitals which fell in quick succession between 30 March and 1 April 2012, sending hundreds of demoralized Malian soldiers fled southwards. The defeats in the north and the international outrage that greeted the overthrow of a democratic government worked to ensure that the military junta would fail to gain legitimacy and it was with alacrity that it accepted the emergence of an interim government led by civilians.

However, all eyes remained on the dire situation in the north. The dynamics there were complicated by the fact that several groups were operating in the north and were tacitly allied with one another against the Malian government. As soon as they had defeated the government forces these groups began to squabble over goals. The MNLA's goal is simple: it wants independence for the north. There is Ansar al-Din which was set up by the mercurial and enigmatic Iyad Ag Ghali, himself a Tuareg from an important tribe. Ansar al-Din is anti-separatist and wants to impose Shariah in Mali. There is Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) which is based in the remote regions of Algeria and which sees the rebellion as an opportunity to deepen its presence in the region. Ansar al-Din and AQIM were natural partners; this was reflected in Ag Ghali's connections with three senior emirs of AQIM: Abu Zeid, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, and Abu Hamme. In mid-March 2012, after the defeat of the

Malian army, a large group of Tuareg leaders held a meeting on the Algerian border; the meeting was apparently intended to get Ag Ghali to give up his Islamist aspirations, stop cooperating with AQIM, and to subscribe to the Tuaregs' goal of an independent state. The Tuareg elders and leaders of the MNLA were particularly incensed by the statements of Ag Ghali and his lieutenants that the aim of the rebellion was to implement Shariah law in Mali. The outside world sat up and took notice, but not in the way that the MNLA wanted. Instead of paying attention to Tuareg aspirations, the outside world was concerned that Al Qaeda and its affiliates were making inroads in yet another "ungoverned space." Within days of the meeting, the MNLA broke with Ag Ghali, branding him a "criminal" whose efforts "to establish a theocratic regime" were anathema "to the foundations of our culture and civilization."

The political animosity spilled over into violent clashes between the MNLA and Ansar al-Din forces in Kidal in June 2012. The situation deteriorated further during the last few months of 2012; the MNLA was opposed by Ansar al-Din which was well-armed, by a shadowy group called the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa, known by its French acronym, MUJAO, whose stronghold is Gao; and by katibas (battalions) of AQIM, the particularly violent North African franchise of Al Qaeda. Not surprisingly, the MNLA lost ground to the religious radicals. By late 2012, the political situation in the north was further complicated by the growing fear on the part of Ag Ghali and Ansar al-Din that the radical foreign jihadists were entrenching themselves at his expense, by the emergence of a pro-government militia known as Ganda Iso in the far north and of a group calling itself the National Azawad Libération Front (Front de Libération Nationale de l'Azawad: FLNA) - which is composed primarily of members of northern Mali's Arab community and publicly denounces both the presence of the Islamists and the secessionist agenda of the

MNLA. Moreover, the population was becoming more incensed by the brutality of the jihadists and their rigid and uncompromising imposition of the Shariah and sporadic protests took place.

Beau Geste? The French Intervention

The victory of the separatists and Islamists in northern Mali, coupled with the political disarray in Bamako following the military coup, led to a flurry of diplomatic activity and military planning by foreign powers. An imposing array of Western and African governments and regional bodies, with the blessing of the United Nations (UN), began to draw up detailed military plans to eliminate the extremist threat in northern Mali and to restore Bamako's sovereignty over the north. The outside world feared that if the Islamists and Al Qaeda entrench themselves in northern Mali, the area would become yet another haven for terrorists threatening fragile African states and establishing a sanctuary in close proximity to Europe.

The basic UN plan called for African military forces to be supported by Western aerial firepower and specialist expertise on the ground to hit and decisively defeat the rebels. Specifically, the UN plan proposed that a force of several thousand foreign troops from 14 countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) would arrive in Mali to beef up the hopelessly disorganized and demoralized Malian military for the forthcoming assault on the rebels. This African force would be supported by a contingent of several hundred Western military advisors and Special Operation Forces, mainly from France and the United States to provide intelligence, logistics, aerial firepower and surveillance (including drones). The international approach proved to be a mess. It proceeded at a glacial pace; however, events on the ground in Mali were moving at lightning speed. The Islamist rebels had continued to marginalize the separatist MNLA and by the end of 2012 they seemed ready to implement their promise of

moving on the southern part of the country. The Malian army was judged incapable of holding them back. Second, although better-armed and trained than the Malian armed forces, there was no guarantee that the promised ECOWAS force would do much better than the Malian army in a fluid fast-moving mobile warfare in the northern desert. Third, an international force from many different countries is a disparate force and issues of command, control, and communications take a long time to iron out before such a force can operate.

However, as the situation in Mali continued to unravel, France decided to take action. France entered the conflict directly in early January 2013. The French clearly have ambitious goals; French president Hollande stated that the goal was to eliminate the extremist presence in northern Mali and restore the authority of the government in the region. This was reiterated by Jean-Yves Le Drian, the French defense minister, shortly after France initiated military action: "The goal is the total reconquest of Mali. We will not leave any pockets." But the war in this remote region of Africa threatens to draw in an international cast of characters. Britain, Italy and Germany have offered some help. However, all eyes are on the United States to potentially become the biggest backer of the French effort. The United States Air Force transported a 600-member French mechanized battalion and its equipment and Tiger helicopter gunships to Mali, and is providing intelligence information, including satellite imagery. The US Air Force has offered to provide refueling tankers to refuel French Air Force Mirage and Rafale fighter-bombers during missions. But this would bring the American involvement to a new level, directly supporting military attacks. For President Obama, who devoted part of his Inaugural Address in January 2013, to a celebration of the end of a war in Iraq and the winding down of the American commitment in Afghanistan, the prospect of getting involved in a conflict against a shadowy enemy far from the United States is

unwelcome, particularly since he seeks to focus on the pressing domestic agenda and healing a divided country.

France's strategy going in was to secure Bamako, Mali's capital, and the southern third of the country, then consolidate on the ground while African troops, backed by French air power, recapture the Islamist-controlled northern cities of Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal. French fears concerning the efficacy of the international effort were realized and France began bearing the brunt of the military offensive in January 2013. The African force was far from ready to assume its role in coordination with the French effort. Only 1,000 African soldiers from five countries had made it to Mali by the third week of January 2013. This was simply not an adequate force to capture the vast northern region. Western trainers and Special Forces have yet to appear. Despite concerns in France over a possible quagmire, the French decided to continue their offensive with the limited forces at their disposal in accordance with the eminently logical principle that it is better to keep the rebel forces under pressure than halt operations which would give them time to recover from the pounding they have recently received.

While French troops have made important gains, it is important for France, the West, and the regional states around Mali to understand that military success will be fleeting if: a) substantial concessions are not made to the Tuaregs; b) extensive reforms are not introduced in Mali itself, including rebuilding and re-equipping of the ramshackle Malian security forces; and c) the regional states, including the "giants" of North Africa, do not implement some form of joint regional security framework to thwart the growth of transnational non-state terrorist and criminal networks. While France had seemingly articulated military objectives to justify its decision to engage directly in the conflict, it is not clear that it has a clean exit strategy. The French are finding that their ally, the Malian gov-

ernment, is weak and feckless. It is not clear that the Malians can maintain control in the north following a French draw-down after the defeat of the extremists. But France cannot afford to maintain large forces in Mali. Mali's problems are not purely, indeed, not even primarily military; they are political and socio-economic in origin. Again, France is not going to get involved in a unilateral nation-building effort in Mali. Last but not least, even if the Islamist extremists are defeated the big question of Tuareg aspirations for autonomy or independence will still remain a serious political issue.

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Facets of Religious Violence in Pakistan

By Muhammad Feyyaz

Organized violence is a key characteristic of the security landscape of contemporary Pakistan. The character of religious violence has evolved from sectarianism to talibanization. This paper briefly reviews facets of religious violence by focusing on religious structures, inter-sect and intra-sect paradigms of the conflict-laden environment.

Religious Terror Organizations

Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the militant organization that has challenged the security of Pakistan on a number of fronts, maintains that its anti-state struggle is influenced by Shariah, which is evident from the diversity of its targets. Until August 2009, TTP has committed a variety of violent acts against human, political, sectarian, strategic, and religious targets. These include ideological challengers such as Maulana Hassan Jan, Maulana Mufti Naeemi, former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, scores of social activists, journalists and tribal competitors. Moreover, its religious propensity is also manifested in trans-border operations conducted in support of the Afghan Taliban movement which helped create the TTP in December 2007. In recent months, the

killing of Bashir Bilour, a front line leader of the Awami National Party and attempts on the life of Malala Yousafzai, an education activist for teenage girls, and leading journalist Hamid Mir alleging their actions as un-Islamic exemplifies this orientation.

In the last three years, two distinct but paradoxical changes have occurred in the overall structure and operational strategy of TTP. First, it now boasts to have franchisees in all four provinces of the country. Each province has a regional commander who coordinates planning, organization and execution of contemplated acts independently or in cooperation with other militant groupings. At the local level, provincial chapters of the TTP give primacy to their particular tribal or ethnic identity, even though they cooperate with other



Political map of Pakistan

Source: Maps of the World

<http://www.mapsofworld.com/pakistan/pakistan-political-map.html>

provincial chapters in terms of operations. when required. At its peak during 2007-2009, Tehrik-e-Taliban Swat (TTS) under Fazalullah was the principal showpiece of TTP's religious philosophy, which over time has transmuted its objectives to embrace elements of terror and criminality.

Second, sophistication, novelty and combat efficiency are the hallmarks of Taliban's recent operations. At the same time however, this operational articulation reflects substantial fragmentation in the erstwhile cohesive cadres of the TTP. The Taliban has been disintegrating due to continued infighting over power and money matters, especially after the killing of Baitullah Mehsud, sustained military operations and mounting alienation from the masses. The Shura-e-Muraqaba, an anti-US war council consisting of five key Al Qaeda-linked Pakistani and Afghan Taliban groups based in Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan (FATA), which was an initiative to repair the Pak-Afghan Taliban relationship, has fallen apart after the November 2012 failed attempt by a TTP suicide bomber to kill Mullah Nazir, a known Taliban leader from South Waziristan Agency (SWA). He was later killed by a drone strike in January 2013. Even though reports of infighting have been dismissed by Hakimullah Mehsud, the current leader of the TTP, it is widely perceived that serious divisions exist inside this collectivity over the issue of leadership on account of the derailed process of attending to original objectives of the organization. Despite these problems, however, the TTP continues to enjoy sizeable support of jihadi constituencies inside Pakistan.

Several independent Taliban clusters are also based in FATA. For example, Waziri and Dawar Taliban from North Waziristan Agency (NWA) comprising of about sixteen major and minor factions led by Hafiz Gul Bahadur, are a formidable grouping that has generally remained away from the TTP due to divergent political dispositions. Likewise, there are six independent

Waziri, Mehsud and Bhattani groups belonging to SWA including the Maulvi Nazir group that maintain their distinct identity. There are also numerous smaller outfits that are loosely affiliated with TTP, operating from diverse locations. These include splinter groups who renounced their parent organization for example, renegades of mainstream Kashmiri fighters (Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JEM), Harkat-ul-Mujahidin al-Alami (HuMA), and possibly Harkat-ul-Ansar. In addition, foreign fighters of Afro-Asian origin belonging to Al Qaeda and its associates such as Qaedat al-Jihad and elements of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIS) are also present in FATA. A few others are the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), Abdullah Azzam Brigades and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG).

Inter-sect Milieu

Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP now Aehle Sunnat wal Jamaat-ASWJ) and Tehrik Nifaze Fiqah-e-Jafria were at the forefront of the sectarian discord during the late 1980s. While Sipah-e-Muhammadi, the pro-Shia armed group has virtually disappeared, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) remains the most ferocious militant group engaged in full scale sectarian war in Pakistan. It is believed to be an armed wing of ASWJ, though the latter categorically denies its linkage with LeJ. LeJ wields strong influence in all regions of the country but most notably in the whole of Punjab, Quetta and Mastung in Balochistan and Karachi in Sindh. Jaish-ul-Islam in Quetta is an offshoot of the LeJ. LeJ's transnational outreach was confirmed when it claimed responsibility for the killing of 55 Shias in Kabul in December 2011.

Tehrik Nifaz Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM) under Sufi Muhammad from Dir joined the sectarian stream during the early 1990s. Tehrik-e-Taliban Swat (TTS) also has its origin in TNSM owing to Fazullah-Sufi's familial connections, which later adopted the pan-Islamist narrative. Meanwhile,

some independent groups have also emerged. For example, in October 2006, Pakhtun militants who fought against the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF), formed a new anti-Shia militant organization led by Mufti Ilyas and Hazrat Ali of Darra Adam Khel and became active in Quetta, Karachi and other major cities in Pakistan. Afridi Taliban led by Tariq Afridi started an identical anti-Shia campaign in Darra Adam Khel by targeting Shias commuting between Peshawar and Kohat. Media reports suggest that attack in Kabul on Shias was carried out by Tariq Afridi at the behest of Al Qaeda and LeJ. Some writers have therefore denoted sectarian killers as "Pakistan's other Taliban".

Figure 1 illustrates the evolution of sectarianism in Pakistan since its creation. It explains how in the period following independence sectarianism gradually increased in intensity and spread from theological to social planes. It is important to point out that for about 35 years, from 1947 until the early 1980s; sectarianism was virtually non-existent in Pakistan.

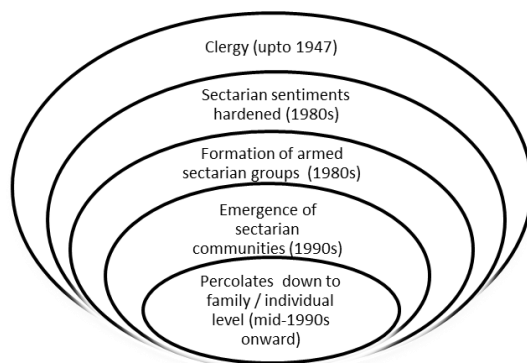


Figure 1: Genesis and transformation of sectarianism

Drivers and contexts of Intra-Sectarian Violence

As religious polarization deepened in Pakistani society, hitherto nonviolent ideological cleavages among Sunnis kept intensifying to draw adherents (Moqalideen) of major schools of Islamic

jurisprudence (Fiqh) and Ghair Moqalideen (deviant of any schools) into a violent competition. It is argued that accentuation of Tauheediat (oneness of Allah) by Sayyid Ahmad during early 19th Century, and the suprahuman exaltation attributed to Prophet Muhammad by Ahmed Raza Khan who influenced the Bareilvi movement in India in the early 20th Century, were the catalysts for intra-sect confrontation in Pakistan.

Ghair Moqalideen constitute diverse sub-belief systems, each pursuing a distinct confession. Ahle Hadith construes Quran and Hadith as the only sources of knowledge together with those (Salafis) who besides Quran and Hadith derive inspiration from select companions (sahabas) of Prophet as well as but not necessarily later two generation of their disciples, i.e. Tābi'ūn (Arabic: التابعون "Followers") and Tābi' al-Tābi'īn (Arabic: تابع التابعين "those after Tabi'un"). In addition, to Ahle Hadith and Salafis, Hanblis who purportedly claim to follow the Hambali School, are widely perceived as Salafis due to their strict interpretation of Tauheedi practices of Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahab at-Tamimi (a prominent religious figure in the 18th century from the Arabian Peninsula and Author of Kitab Tawheed). Maulana Habib-ur-Rehman Ludhianwi, President of the Punjab Khilafat Committee had written to Muhammad Iqbal on 25 August 1926, quoting a conversation with King Ibn Saud at Hijaz that the Saudis are Moqalideen of Hanbli Fiqh and propaganda against them was articulated by Ahle Hadid Ulama (religious scholars) to win over their sympathies.

Wahabis have emerged as a de facto sect, who view the four Sunni schools with disdain and disapproval. In Pakistan, Wahabis are mostly confused with Ahle Hadith, which is historically incorrect. Ahle Hadith assert themselves as a sub-continental movement vaguely beginning in the 8th Century that grounds its tradition into belief of advent of Hadith (sayings of Prophet Muhammad) into this region directly through

various sahabas during the life time of the Prophet. Hence, they are called "Ahle-Hadith" (bearers of the sayings of the Prophet). Nonetheless, both have tacit agreement on Tau-heediat.

Compared to these three sectarian streams, Deobandis and Barelvis regard themselves as Moqalideen with subtle variations. Both follow Hanfi law; but whereas the Barelvis are considered a moderate variant, Deobandis are orthodox Hanfis who despise innovations (bida't) alleging Barelvis as polytheists due to the latter's reverence to Sufi shrines and saints. In this orientation, they are joined by all others including Wahabis, Ahle Hadith and Salafis who also term Barelvis as mushrik and heretics. It may be noted that Deobandis also believe in the Sufi order and revere saints but are opposed to interceding them between God for deliverance and providence which drives the fundamental conflict.

The Salafis in Pakistan mostly include Arab elements within the ranks of Al Qaeda who brought with them strict interpretation of sacred scripts and have measurably influenced the ideological orientation of the Taliban. TTP is by and large a Deobandi organization characterized by a tribal social code of conduct with elements drawn from Wahabism. For instance, the leadership of the LeT, Hafiz Saeed and his close affiliates, personify many characteristics of Salafism. The TTS, unlike the TTP, is said to have been influenced more by the Wahabi school due to Arab Afghan settlement in Swat after the Afghan jihad in the 1980s. There are, however, a few other groups whose sectarian identity is somewhat dubious. For example, the Panjpiris, who originate from a village in Swabi district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Khyber agency-based militant group Lashkar-e-Islam (Mangal Bagh group), are perceived as Salafis. For some, Lashkar-e-Islam follows Deobandi and Panjpiri creeds while linkage with Wahabi Islam makes assertion of it being of the former classification a suspect.

The four intra-sectarian conflict paradigms can be inferred within the Sunni sect:

First, it is essentially Moqalideens are essentially the Ahle Hadith, Salafis, Deobandis, Neobandis and Wahabis pitched against the Barelvis. Pakistan's "shrine culture" that still thrives in the subcontinent is under attack from all of these camps. Almost all attacks on shrines in Khyber Agency and Peshawar have been claimed by Lashkar-e-Islam.

Second, involves the dispute between the Moqalideen and Ghair Moqalideen, the most pronounced being the intractable violence between Ansaar ul-Islam (Pakistan), an anti-Taliban armed Bareilvi group located in FATA with its rival Lashkar-e-Islam. It has caused huge loss to human lives and property. Identically, after falling apart from the TTP, Jamait Ahle Hadith (JAH - a group of Hadith adherents), is one of its many competitors in Orakzai agency. In an ideological sense, this feud may be classified as Moqalideen versus Ghair Moqalideen but in essence its real contention lies in the TTP's anti-government violent drive as well as realpolitik which is believed to have caused this alienation. This situation can be better understood if the conflict is viewed from the perspective of intergroup rivalry i.e., Ahle Hadith, Wahabis as well as Salafis each versus Barelvis. An empirical version of this feud can also be seen in the 2007 war in SWA between Moulvi Nazir Taliban against foreign militants, especially Uzbeks (generally labeled as Salafis), forcing them to take refuge with Baitullah Mehsud.

Third, in the intra-Moqalideen domain, Deobandis have positioned themselves against Barelvis resulting in violent incidents on the eve of Eid Milad un Nabi (birthday celebrations of Prophet) for the last few years. Since 2008, Deobandis have also been further split owing to policy or cultural variables rather than religious reasons. Fourth, sustained violence between JAH and various factions of the FATA based Salafi mili-

tant structures including foreign elements highlight contours of intra Ghair Moqalideen competition.

Conclusion

The variegated scene of violence in Pakistan presents symptoms of nascent anarchy which shows no sign of easing in near future. Absence of a coherent national strategy and lack of political will to counter the same has further compounded the situation. Unless addressed effectively and in time, it could augment religious polarization leading to more instability in a country reeling under Taliban militancy, ethno-political violence and other forms of social unrest.

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Regional Implications of Pakistan's Changing Militant Landscape

By Abdul Basit

With the expected US withdrawal from Afghanistan in mid-2014, the militant landscape is changing very fast. It is imperative for both the political and military leaders in Pakistan to take note of these developments and fine-tune their counter-terrorism policies to address the future challenges faced by Pakistan.

Many of the current terrorist threat assessments emphasize that the epicenter of global terrorism has shifted from the Afghanistan-Pakistan region to the Sahel region of North and Central Africa. This is based on the assessment that the US drone campaign in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) has considerably weakened Al Qaeda. Except for Ayman al-Zawahiri, the US has eliminated almost all of Al Qaeda's top leaders. However, if the problem of the Afghan conflict remains unresolved, Al Qaeda will resurrect itself with the help of its Pakistani, Afghan and other regional affiliates.

Regional peace and stability will hinge upon two things:

- a) how well the US executes its troops withdrawal from Afghanistan
- b) and how Pakistan handles the challenge of extremism and terrorism in its tribal regions, post-June 2014

If the situation in Afghanistan deteriorates after the withdrawal of International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) in 2014, it will further attract jihadists across the globe to flock to Afghanistan, similar to the current situation in Syria.

Recently, the umbrella group of the Pakistani Taliban, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), has significantly increased their attacks on state symbols and politicians, while stepping up their propaganda campaign. It is widely expected that Pakistan's campaign against the terrorist elements will start only when the US leaves Afghanistan. But it will be a long and hard road which requires a clear long-term strategy at the social, political,

ideological and military levels.

Unfortunately at the political level, Pakistan still lacks the will and clarity to take on the Islamist militants groups in its north-western tribal region despite losing more than 40,000 civilians and 6,000 security personnel in the fight. Despite the recent attacks such as, the October 2012 assassination attempt on Malala Yousafzai, an education activist for teenage girls from Swat, the abortive suicide attempt in the Mohmand tribal region on the late Qazi Hussain Ahmed, the former head of the Jamaat-e-Islami, and lastly the killing of the senior minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Bashir Biloure, in a suicide attack in Peshawar, there is little consensus that the political parties in Pakistan will launch a full scale retribution against the militants. On the contrary, it further led to wider political divisions as some political groups advocate for the elimination of these terror networks, while others advocate negotiating with the TTP.

Shortcomings of the Pakistani Military Strategy

At the military level, the approach so far has been to contain the threat posed by TTP. However, the containment is counter-productive for four reasons:

First, TTP does not view jihad/insurgency as a modus operandi or a means to a greater end (Islamic emirate or Islamic caliphate). To them, jihad is an end in itself. It is a way of life, a mission and a cause worth living and dying for.

Second, TTP affiliates subscribe to the Khurasaan utopia. The Khurasaan utopia relates

to a prophecy of the Prophet Muhammad. According to them, "an Islamist movement of black flags will rise from the land of Khurasaan (current day Afghanistan, tribal regions of Pakistan, Xinjiang province of China and some parts of Central Asia and Iran). It will establish the system of Islamic caliphate across the globe and no power will be able to stop them." In their publications and speeches both the Al Qaeda and TTP refer these regions as Khurasaan. Ideologically, they are convinced that they belong to a promising group of believers who will fulfill the prophecy of the Prophet Muhammad.

Third, from TTP's track record it is evident that it is expansionist in nature. Neither the peace agreement nor the disjointed and poorly coordinated military operations have succeeded in limiting its growth beyond FATA. Though, the Pakistani army has achieved some limited tactical gains against the group, these are fragile and reversible. In retrospect, TTP has used all the peace deals (nine in total) with the Pakistani government to buy time to regroup and reorganize itself. The last peace agreement with the TTP's Swat chapter, known as Nizam-e-Adal

Regulation Act 2009 (The System of Justice) in Swat district of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, which granted TTP its longstanding demand of Shariah law had failed to limit its expansion beyond Swat. In a couple of months after the implementation of Nizam-e-Adal Act, TTP moved into the neighbouring districts of Shangla and Buner, in violation of the peace agreement. In Punjab, it found allies in the province's southern districts, known as the "Punjabi Taliban", and collaborated with Sunni sectarian militant groups as well. Most recently, it has shown a strong presence in the port city of Karachi as well.

Fourth, so far the Pakistani security forces used the policy of "divide and rule" in FATA against TTP along with anti-Taliban tribal militias (locally known as lashkars). They took advantage of the differences between the Afghan-focused Hafiz Gul Bahadur and Mullah Nazir groups; and the anti-Pakistan TTP affiliated groups. However, after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan this policy will not work. The differences between these groups are organizational in nature at the tactical and operational level. On the other hand, strategically and ideologically, they agree on



Despite relocation of the epicenter of global jihad from the Af-Pak region to the Sahil region of North and West Africa, Pakistan still remains the most frequently visited destination of aspirant jihadists around the globe.

Photo credit: Agence France-Presse. <http://dawn.com/2011/12/07/mission-impossible-for-pakistani-progressives/>

policies of jihad and Islamization.

TTP's Regional Aspirations

A matter of grave concern is the TTP's new found interest in the Kashmir conflict. It is neither accidental nor can its anti-India statements be brushed aside as mere rhetoric. In the last two months, TTP has issued two elaborate statements on India. The first statement was issued on 22 November 2012 against India's execution of Ajmal Kasab, the lone terrorist involved in the Mumbai attacks in November 2008, to be captured alive. The TTP spokesperson Ehsanullah Ehsan stated, "We have decided to target Indians to avenge the killing of Ajmal Kasab." He threatened, "If they [Indians] don't return his body to us or his family we will capture Indians and will not return their bodies."

The second statement was in a 46 minute-long video in Pashtu with Urdu subtitles produced by TTP's media wing Umar Media on 8 January 2013. In this video, TTP's deputy leader Waliur Rehman criticized Pakistan's Kashmir policy. He maintained that Pakistan's Kashmir policy ruined the Kashmiris and destroyed everything. He stated, "we strongly condemn this policy as much as we do about India's atrocities."

Waliur Rehman claimed that Pakistan's efforts have failed to yield results and therefore, vowed to launch its own jihad in the valley. He stated,

Allah willing, the Mujahideen of TTP will arrive in Kashmir and as per the Islamic Shariah.....As our ancestors sacrificed their lives for Kashmir and had got Kashmir liberated by force [in 1947-48], the same way walking in the footsteps of their forefathers, we will get Kashmir liberated [from India], and will help them get their rights.



A video produced by Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan's (TTP), Umar Studio in which its leaders threatened to launch jihad in Indian Administered Kashmir (IAK).

Photo credit: The Middle East Media Research Institute.

Similarly, in its video speeches and messages TTP's leaders frequently talk about extending a helping hand to the suffering ethnic Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar and the Uighur Muslims in China's Xinjiang province. The TTP also has close affiliation with the East Turkistan Islamic Party (ETIM), a separatist Islamist movement of Chinese Xinjiang province. The ETIM supporters actively participate with TTP in its terrorist operation in FATA.

One can undermine TTP's global ambition of striking the US or Europe in their homelands, but its regional outreach and networking with other Islamist militants groups cannot be easily brushed aside. Regionally, it has the will and capability to strike whenever an opportunity will present itself.

More specifically, the TTP's rhetoric of sending its fighters to fight in Indian Administered Kashmir is potentially explosive. It can reinvigorate the past ghost of Kashmir jihad and can result in a partnership between the banned Kashmiri jihadi groups and the TTP. Terrorism is already a big stumbling block in the normalization of Indo-Pak relations. TTP's addition as an irritant in the Indo-Pak equation will seriously jeopardize normalization and the peace process.

Given the above, the recent overtures on the part of certain political parties which include Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (Movement

for the Justice) to negotiate with the TTP, harbours on naivety and an oversimplified worldview. However, Pakistan cannot defeat TTP militarily with the use of force alone. There is a need for a clear and sustainable political solution which probably could involve negotiation. The upcoming US withdrawal from Afghanistan places Pakistan at an important cross-road of its history. It could be both a challenge and opportunity for Pakistan to rid itself of its jihadist elements. The possible solution is to use all of its national power and work with its neighbour that share similar threats. If Islamabad fails to do that, it could very likely descend into further chaos.

Abdul Basit is a Senior Analyst at ICPVTR.

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For further inquiries regarding subscription and access to the Global Pathfinder database, please email Ms. Elena Ho Wei Ling at the following email address: isewlho@ntu.edu.sg

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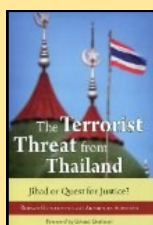
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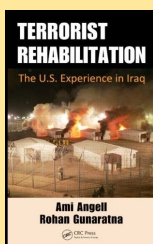
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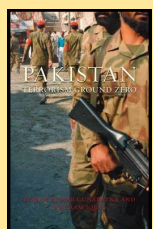
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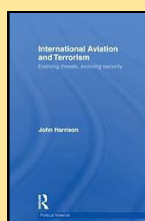
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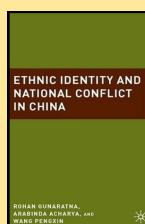
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