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## South Asia

Jun 16, 2006

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CHARTS

### Taliban's call for jihad answered in Pakistan

By Syed Saleem Shahzad

CHAMAN, Pakistan - The "Afghan" market of Chaman in Balochistan province is within walking distance of the checkpoint that marks the border with Afghanistan's Spin Boldek area. Many thousands of people criss-cross between the countries every day.

Electronic items such as new and used video-disc players, old Pentium laptop computers and second-hand digital cameras are on sale for throwaway prices.

But as dusk settles, much of the main activity takes place in small shops that rent laptop computers, which attract teenage boys like magnets.

This correspondent entered one of the shops, where an action movie with noisy background songs was playing. The scene

showed some Middle Eastern-looking youths with long beards surrounding a convoy and firing bullets and rockets. They yelled for an ambulance when one of their colleagues was injured in crossfire.

"What are you watching?"

"Jihad," replied one of the kids.

"What?" (The reply was not immediately comprehensible.)

"Jihad, jihad. Do not you understand 'jihad'?" asked the shopkeeper incredulously.

No word could better sum up the situation in this volatile area than "jihad".

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A VCD cover depicting a 2001 incident at Kelai Jungi in Afghanistan, where hundreds of Taliban prisoners were killed by US forces during an uprising.



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But it was not meant to be the case.

More than a decade ago, the area was the back yard of the Taliban movement, from where many of its second-tier leaders emerged to bolster the government in Kabul.

But as recently as a year ago, after concerted efforts by the Pakistan government as a partner in the US-led "war on terror", the region was said to have been won over, as was to serve as a hub for trade between South and Central Asia.

Billions of dollars were poured into infrastructure, notably highways, tunnels and railway tracks to connect Chaman with Gwadar port on the Balochistan coastline and Karachi port as the foundations for an international trade grid.

A town-planning blueprint was drawn up to transform Chaman into a modern commercial city in preparation for its new role as a gateway to Central Asia.

In one respect the plan worked. There are definite signs of prosperity in the town and its surrounds, manifested in flashy cars, abundant markets and lavish houses.

And it has become a hub - a hub for radicalism.

"All the districts near the Afghan border, whether it is Chaman or Pashin, have been heavily radicalized. We hear news every other day in our villages or nearby villages that the body of a youth has come back from Afghanistan," Abdul Rahman, a resident of Pashin who runs a non-governmental organization (NGO) for HIV/AIDS awareness, told Asia Times Online.

"We wander from village to village in Chaman and other districts and we see that youths do not have any other passion in life but to go to Afghanistan and kill Americans," Rahman said.

Asghar, a local trader, added: "Exactly the same trend exists on the other side of the border in Spin Boldek and Kandahar." Asghar, who frequently travels to Kandahar and Spin Boldek, continued: "It's the same tribes, the same people on the both side of the divide."

It's no surprise, therefore, that the favorite movies for young males are *Jung hi Jung* ("War and War" - a story of Taliban-led operations against the Americans) and *Kelai Jungi*, the story of the massacre of Taliban detainees in Mazar-i Sharif in 2001.

Also popular are old-stock videos of the Iraqi resistance and jihadi songs and films. Stores also sell new movie releases, whether they be Pashtu, Indian or Persian.

"All the CDs [compact discs] come from Afghanistan. We just cut and paste from the CD writer and make copies for sale," a store owner said. They sell for about 50 US cents each.

NGO worker Rahman blames the radicalization of the youths on the mullahs, who he says deliberately whip up the fever of jihad so that they can get their hands on the steady flow of jihadist funds from abroad.

"No, this is not the case," said cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan. "This [radicalization] is [because of] America's worldwide oppressive policies, which generate this sort of reaction, and also what has been done by the government of Pakistan.

"They killed hundreds in the name of the 'war on terror' and handed over hundreds to the US. They carried out assaults in Waziristan [Pakistani tribal area]," Imran Khan told Asia Times

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Online in Quetta, the capital of Balochistan. "Had I been a Waziristani, I would have been doing the same that the Waziristanis are doing against the Pakistani security forces."

Tellingly, the road from Quetta to Chaman reveals fresh wall chalkings lauding the Amirul Momineen ("commander of the faithful", Taliban leader Mullah Omar) and Qaidul Mujahideen ("leader of the mujahideen", Osama bin Laden), along with slogans wishing long life to the Taliban movement and the mujahideen.

#### Jihad all over again

As stated above, the Pakistani border area with Afghanistan was a fertile ground for the Taliban as it gained strength and eventually took power in Kabul in 1996. The numerous *madrassas* (seminaries) churned out thousands of sufficiently eager and ideologically programmed students (both Pakistani and Afghan) to join the movement.

The feeling on the ground is that once again the Pakistani border towns will fuel the Taliban fire. Here, the Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Islam (JUI) is the major power broker.

The JUI is the most influential component of the six-party opposition religious grouping, the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA).

The JUI has two factions, one led by Maulana Samiul Haq and the other by the leader of the opposition in the national parliament, Maulana Fazlur Rehman. Both factions were key patrons of the Taliban in the mid-1990s.

However, despite being a part of the MMA, Samiul Haq openly sides with Pakistani President General Pervez Musharraf, while Rehman's JUI is believed to have some arrangement with Musharraf's government to allow it to dominate the provincial governments in North West Frontier and Balochistan provinces.

As such, the factions officially distance themselves from the Taliban and claim they will boot out any members with such affiliations.

However, it is not as simple as that. The JUI's election success was based on its unequivocal support for the mujahideen struggle in Afghanistan against foreign invaders.

Further, the hard core of the JUI still comprises former jihadi commanders who fought alongside the Taliban during their rise to power. Because of their immense popularity, they were given tickets for national elections, in which they scored sweeping victories.

#### A call for action

Now, as the Taliban's spring offensive gains unprecedented momentum, these contradictions within the JUI are becoming sharp, and forcing members to take a stand.

In the latest reports of violence, news wires said that 15 suspected militants, apparently including a relative of Mullah Omar, were killed on Monday by Afghan security forces. Further heavy casualties were reported in clashes on Wednesday. Over the past month, more than 550 people, mostly militants, have been reported killed.

More than 30,000 foreign troops will be in Afghanistan within the next few months, bolstered by a large North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) presence, which is strengthening its position in the south of the country, including 8,000 from Britain.

Hekmit Cetin, NATO's chief civilian representative in Iraq, as quoted by Conn Hallinan of Foreign Policy In Focus, said, "NATO


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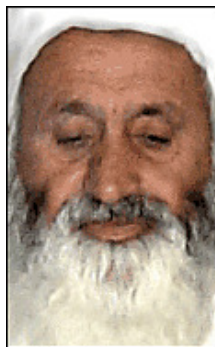
can't afford to fail in Afghanistan. If we don't go to Afghanistan, Afghanistan will come to us, as terrorists, as narcotics traffickers."

The Taliban will be ready. Mullah Mohammed Kaseem Faroqi, the Taliban commander in Helmand province, recently told The Times of London, "My message to [Prime Minister] Tony Blair and the whole of Britain is, 'Do not send your children here. We will kill them.'"

One of the voices calling for the JUI to clarify its stance is that of Maulana Noor Mohammed, a member of the National Assembly in Islamabad from Quetta and a top leader of the JUI's Rehman faction. He recently urged the JUI to support the Taliban, no matter what the cost.

Asia Times Online met Noor, who is about 80, in his Quetta office.

**ATol:** You asked for complete support for the Taliban. What is the rationale behind this? Do you not think that this would be an intervention in the affairs of a neighboring country?



Maulana Noor  
Mohammed

**Noor** (*Opening the constitution of the JUI*):

The constitution of the JUI clearly states that when Muslim traditions and Muslim lands are under threat, the JUI must play a role [he cited many clauses backing this up]. It clearly speaks of supporting Muslim liberation movements across the globe, that is why we support Hamas [in Palestine], we support Bosnian Muslims. When the US invaded Afghanistan we formed a council for the defense of Pakistan and Afghanistan, which we later converted into the six-party religious alliance [MMA]. The Taliban are still fighting against a foreign presence, and we should support them.

**ATol:** Will such support not cost you and your party heavily?

**Noor:** You have to understand that the JUI is actually a movement which has strong traditions and history. Our first leader was Mujadid Alf-i-Thani [who stood up against the Mughal emperor Akber when he developed the religion Din-i-Ilahi, which is a mix of Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism].

Shah Waliullah Dehalvi [a renowned reformist during the Mughal era who is still followed throughout South, Central and Southwest Asia] was another one, and then came Shah Abdul Aziz Dehalvi, who further picked up the pace of the movement. [Noor then gave a long list of JUI leaders over the years who had resisted oppression.]

You can see the whole legacy of our leaders is jihad, the fight against oppression and support for Muslim movements. This is what the JUI constitution speaks for.

**ATol:** The whole movement was just for the Indian subcontinent. It did not go into other countries.

**Noor** (*once again reading from the JUI constitution*): "To strive for the [safeguarding] of Islam, Islamic tenets and the center of Islam ... to provide support to Muslims in occupied territories and to support Muslim minorities in non-Muslim majority areas." Where is it written that it has any territorial limits? It is a global agenda.

Now I will again go back to history.

When the British attacked Afghanistan, we supported the Afghan rulers and sent our leaders, like Ubaidullah Sindhi, who stayed

there for seven years, and worked for the cause of the liberation of Afghanistan. The Ulema-i-Deoband [who graduated from the Deoband Islamic seminary in northern India] had a special status in Afghanistan and was admired by Afghan rulers.

... Similarly, we had a role when the former USSR invaded Afghanistan and our leader, Maulana Mufti Mehmood [a former chief minister of North West Frontier Province and father of Maulana Fazlur Rehman], issued a religious decree in favor of an Afghan jihad, and even when the Taliban emerged we supported them.

So the question is, why not now, when [President George W] Bush and his allies have launched a wicked crusade on Muslims? Should we not support the Taliban movement because a mean General Musharraf is our ruler and he turned the Pakistan army into a US force which caught 600 Muslim mujahideen and handed them over to the US? And Musharraf proudly says this, and he killed dozens of others and detained their families.

**ATol:** But the MMA rules in two provinces and is not sure what to do in the "war on terror".

**Noor:** The MMA should adopt a clear policy about the Taliban. Does it support the Taliban or not? When the Americans threatened to invade Afghanistan [2001], as I said, we formed the council for the defense of Pakistan and Afghanistan. So what is the point to retreat?

I spoke to the MMA leadership and asked for a debate at an upcoming session of the MMA. So why not announce clear support to mujahideen all over the world, including the Taliban?

The mujahideen are the opposition force of the day against Bush and his allies. Those who keep two opinions on the MMA's role, other than [being with the mujahideen], are just Bush's allies.

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