

Omar al Shishani: ISIS' Chechen Senior Commander

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Key Personalities: Terrorist Leaders

We are pleased to release Volume 7, Issue 10 (November 2015) of the Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis (CTTA) at www.rsis.edu.sg/research/icpvtr/ctta (ISSN 2382-6444) by the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore.

The articles in this issue provide an overview of four prominent personalities and their association with political violence in respective countries. The individuals profiled in this issue demonstrate that there is no single pathway to radicalisation and violence, and the predisposition to violence hinges on a combination of personal and social factors, including, but not limited to, the concerned person's leadership qualities like religious scholarship and persuasive oratory skills.

Matthew Graham examines the rise of Omar al Shishani, the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS)'s Chechen commander. While Omar al Shishani has brought some members of Jaish al Muhajireen (JMA) – the group which he was formerly aligned – closer to ISIS, other JMA members have joined ISIS' rival, Jabhat Al Nusra (JN), which has the potential to weaken the appeal of the Islamic State.

Abdul Basit profiles Afghan Taliban's new leader, Mullah Akhtar Mansoor, a senior commander of the Taliban regime with close ties to the Pakistani military establishment and the future of the group as it confronts tough choices – whether to negotiate a peace and power-sharing deal or continue with the spate of violence as it has been doing since 2001.

Sara Mahmood offers an account of Malik Ishaq, one of Pakistan's most feared terrorists and the leader of the anti-Shi'ite group, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), finding that that his involvement in sectarian killings have left a mark on the country's Sunni-Shia divide.

In her article, **Aida Arosoaie**, demonstrates how, Hadi Al-Amiri's growing military and political clout has not only made the Badr Organisation an indispensable counter-weight against Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) but also brought the spectre of increased insecurity and instability for Iraq due to his indulgence in bloody sectarian campaigns.

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Design and Layout Okkie Tanupradja

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Omar Al-Shishani: ISIS' Senior Chechen Commander

Matthew Graham

The article explores Omar al Shishani's role as a commander for the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) and his success in helping ISIS to attract historic numbers of non-Arab mujahideen to join the group.

Introduction

Among the foreign, non-Arab fighters with the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS), Abu Omar al Shishani ("Omar the Chechen") is the most recognisable. Unlike other ISIS' leaders and field commanders, al Shishani frequently features in photos and videos released by ISIS – often appearing unmasked. With his red beard, youthful European features and heavily accented spoken Arabic, al Shishani provides non-Arab Muslims in particular, with an image which they can associate with and draw inspiration from, in their bid to wage jihad. Since al Shishani's pledge of allegiance in 2013, ISIS has attracted some 20,000 foreign recruits to Syria and Iraq, including 4,000 Westerners and up to 2,000 from the North Caucasus region, representing a far greater concern as compared to the inflow of mujahideen to the Soviet War in the yesteryears of the Soviet-Afghan war during the 1980s (Makhchkala 2015; Sharma 2015).

The majority of the Western recruits originate from Western Europe. While France has the largest outflow – 1,200 residents – of foreign fighters, proportionally, Belgium has produced the largest number of new recruits as compared to the other European states (Radio Free Europe 2015; Sharma 2015). Terrorist recruits from North Caucasus, particularly in the Russian regions of Dagestan and Chechnya are roughly estimated to be at 1,500, comprising some 50 to 200 ethnic-Chechens from Georgia's Pankisi region who have joined ISIS (Mamon 2015; Sharma 2015).

With only a few thousand residents, new recruits traveling from Pankisi to join ISIS represent a much larger proportion than the fighters represented in the North Caucasus region and nations in Western Europe.

Al Shishani's Foray into Militancy

Al Shishani was born Tarkhan Batirashvili in 1986, and grew up in a small village located in an eastern region of Georgia, called Pankisi. Al Shishani's first experience in battle came when he and his brother Tamaz, joined the Georgian armed forces in 2006. Tamaz, like many Muslim males living in Pankisi during the 1990s, crossed the border to fight against Russia in the Chechen War (which lasted from 1994 to 1996).

A decade later, the government of Georgia recruited Tamaz to join a newly created intelligence and special operations force funded by the U.S. to fight Russian aggression. Al Shishani was eager to gain the expertise that his brother Tamaz acquired while fighting in Chechnya (Mackedon 2004; Cathcart 2014). While Tamaz drew inspiration from his resentment of the Russian campaign against Muslims in Chechnya, al Shishani's decision to enter the military seemed motivated by a genuine sense of nationalism. In fact, al Shishani tried persuading his brother to avoid traveling to Chechnya and embracing radical beliefs (Cathcart 2014).

Ironically, it was also al Shishani's nationalist disposition that placed him on the path to radicalisation. After completing his military training, al Shishani fought on the side of Georgia in the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. Thereafter, he contracted tuberculosis, and was dismissed from his unit due to the illness; the government would not provide al Shishani a pension or even expenses for his treatment (Cathcart 2014). Unemployed and stunted by the government for which he served loyally, Al Shishani returned to Pankisi.

During this time, al Shishani lived poor and desperate, and in a region prone to smuggling. This facilitated his turn to weapons trafficking and his subsequent arrest by Georgian authorities (Cathcart 2014; Prothero 2015). Al Shishani spent nearly two years in prison, and during this time, he came to fully embrace Islam. Following his release in September 2012, driven by his grievances, al Shishani left for Istanbul,

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where a community of ethnic-Chechen expats were living (Paraszczyk 2013; Prothero 2015). It is unclear whether al Shishani had already pledged allegiance to a jihadist group in the Caucasus region or before traveling to Turkey. However, al Shishani traveling to Turkey immediately after his release, and his making international headlines for commanding a contingent of foreign jihadists in Syria weeks later, highlights that becoming a mujahideen was his intention (Abdul-Ahad 2012).

Transforming into a Mujahideen in Syria

Al Shishani crossed the border into Syria, taking advantage of the loose controls at the Turkey-Syria border (Arango and Schmitt 2015). Al Shishani's military training, as well as his combat experience during the Russo-Georgian War made him an invaluable asset to jihadist factions battling the Assad regime (Cathcart 2014; Mamon 2015). Joining their ranks in Syria was therefore, an easy transition for al Shishani.

Mujahireen Brigade

In Syria, al Shishani rose quickly to prominence. In 2012, al Shishani was given command of Katibat al-Muhajireen (“Muhajireen Brigade”), a hardline Sunni militia comprising mostly of Chechen and Russian fighters (Roggio 2013; TRAC 2015).

Despite the small size of his force, al Shishani developed a reputation for skill and bravery by partnering frequently with the Al Qaeda-affiliate Jabhat al Nusra (JN) to execute high-profile assaults on key Syrian military bases, including the Sheikh Suleiman base, as well as the Syrian air defense and Scud missile base in Aleppo (Roggio 2012; Roggio 2013) which helped boost the notoriety of al Shishani.

Many of al Shishani's accomplishments drew international headlines (Abdul-Ahad 2012). Within a few months, al Shishani found himself commanding several other mujahideen groups. These groups united under the Caucasus Emirate to coordinate operations as a single force known as the Jaish al Muhajireen (JMA, otherwise known as the "Army of Emigrants and Supporters") (al-Shishani 2013; Roggio 2013).

ISIS

Despite the success of the Caucasus Emirate, al Shishani began to identify with the ISIS vision of organising all jihadist groups under the operational command of a single caliphate. Soon after JMA's formation in spring 2013, signs emerged that al Shishani intended to pledge the group's allegiance to ISIS (Roggio 2013). While the extent of the relationship between al Shishani and ISIS at the time remains unclear, in August 2013, JMA and ISIS collaborated to launch the final siege of the Minakh air base in Syria's northern Aleppo province (Barnard and Saad 2013). By December 2013, al Shishani revealed that he was an ISIS commander who had pledged allegiance to al Baghdadi (Paraszczuk 2013; U.S. Treasury Department 2014).

Since assuming the position of senior ISIS commander in mid-2014, al Shishani has featured in many of the videos and photographs released by ISIS (U.S. Department of State 2015). Photographs of al Shishani inspecting the Humvees seized from the Iraqi-city of Mosul in June 2014 were posted across social media outlets (Moore 2014). A month later, al Shishani was featured in a YouTube video declaring that the border between Iraq and Syria has been "eliminated" (Mrou 2014; YouTube 2014). In the video in question, Al Shishani was featured with his face unmasked as he delivered the group's announcement. This marked an aberration from ISIS' propaganda videos which typically feature ISIS members with their faces concealed. In this regard, ISIS has capitalised on al Shishani to build its ranks by providing non-Arab Muslims a

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face with which they can associate, with the goal of inspiring and radicalising greater numbers of non-Arab Muslims.

Impact of Al Shishani's Rise

Caucasus Region

Fueled by rumours of al Shishani's grandiose lifestyle – including his villa, harem of women and personal security detail, growing numbers of Kist youth, frustrated by the entrenched unemployment and poverty in Georgia's Pankisi region, are turning to embrace Wahhabi beliefs and flocking to Syria to fight for ISIS (Cathcart 2014). However, al Shishani's impact has outgrown Pankisi and spread regionally across the Caucasus.

Eager to experience the same success, hundreds of Muslims from the Caucasus region have joined the Syrian civil war since al Shishani pledged allegiance to ISIS (Prothero 2015). Al Shishani has been portraying the Chechen leadership as weak and concerned more with Russian affairs than with the interests of Muslims; with the hopes of inspiring Muslims into becoming radicalised and to organise attacks under ISIS. In 2014, ISIS announced its intention to fight in Russia and seize Chechnya (Nemtsova 2014).

Al Shishani's actions have therefore heightened the potential for ISIS to open operations in the Caucasus region.

Syria

Since 2014, Al Shishani's regular appearances in ISIS social media have helped draw a large following of mujahideen to Syria to join ISIS (Irshaid 2014). At the same time, many fighters that fought under al Shishani before he became an ISIS commander, have distanced themselves from him due to the violent tactics ISIS employed to consolidate its power among jihadist factions in Syria. ISIS' rivalry with JN has also been strengthened directly through a number of former JMA members who have joined JN. Despite the small size of his force, al Shishani developed a reputation for skill and bravery by partnering frequently with the Al Qaeda-affiliate Jabhat al Nusra (JN) to execute high-profile assaults on key Syrian military bases, including the Sheikh Suleiman base, as well as the Syrian air defense and Scud missile base in Aleppo (Roggio 2012; Roggio 2013) which helped boost the notoriety of al Shishani. In 2014, the JMA contingent that refused to follow al Shishani into ISIS joined a coalition of jihadist groups called Jabhat Ansar al Din ("The Supporters of the Religion Front"). The coalition combined forces to continue operating neutrally in the Syrian Civil War (Al-Tamimi 2014). However, after attempts to assassinate the leadership of the reconstituted JMA fighting as part of Jabhat Ansar al Din, the remaining JMA members pledged allegiance to JN in September 2015 (Roggio 2015; Westall 2015). The move was seen to boost the JN vis-a-vis ISIS.

Conclusion

Al Shishani's role as a senior commander in ISIS has divided the Islamist opposition. While the image of al Shishani and his exploits in Syria has helped to attract large numbers of new recruits to join ISIS, his actions to consolidate the power of the organisation embittered the mujahideen already fighting in the country. The resentment fostered by al Shishani has led a number of groups, including JN, to unite against ISIS instead of battling against the Syrian government. Nonetheless, Al Shishani's Chechen roots and his senior position in the group – portends greater numbers of recruits from Russia's North Caucasus joining the ranks of ISIS.

Matthew Graham is a graduate student at Columbia University, focusing on international security policy. He has held positions in the United Nations Peacekeeping Department and the U.S. Senate. In 2015, he served as a volunteer analyst at with the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), NTU.

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Future of the Afghan Taliban Under Mullah Akhtar Mansoor

Abdul Basit

The article analyses Afghan Taliban under its new leader Mullah Akhtar Mansoor. Given his accommodative political disposition and pragmatic decision-making approach, it will be easier to engage him in peace talks. His leadership will have a major impact on the future of the Taliban movement, particularly in view of the advance of the ISIS in Afghanistan and on the trajectory of the conflict in the country as a whole.

Mullah Akhtar Mansoor was appointed the head of Afghan Taliban in July 2015, following reports confirming the demise of Mullah Omar. The founder of Taliban, Mullah Omar, had died in April 2013, but his death was kept secret from the public; it was only until 29 July 2015 that Afghanistan's Intelligence Agency, the National Directorate of Security (NDS), disclosed news of his passing. As Mullah Omar's deputy since 2010, Mullah Akhtar Mansoor had to assume Mullah Omar's post as the head of Afghan Taliban in very testing times. The news of Mullah Omar's death broke days before the second round of Pakistan-brokered peace talks between the Afghan Taliban and the Afghan Unity Government. The immediate implication of the disclosure of his death was the scuttling of peace talks (Ahmad 2015). More specifically, the Afghan government doubted Pakistan's intentions for keeping Mullah Omar's death a secret and thereafter, backed out from the peace talks.

Mansoor's Background

Mansoor is one of the few remaining senior commanders of the Taliban regime currently active; other senior commanders have either passed on, switched sides, reconciled with the Afghan government, or given up militancy. Mansoor was born in a small village near Maiwand district, in southern Afghanistan's Kandahar province.

A Pashtun from the Ishaqzai tribe, Mansoor later received his religious education from Jamia Haqqania (Madrassa Haqqania), run by an extremist cleric Maulana Sami-ul-Haq. Many of the Afghan Taliban's top leadership were also the alumni of Jamia Haqqania (Tribune 2015). During the 1980s, Mansoor fought against the Soviet troops in Afghanistan for a brief period and was part of Harkat-i-Inqilab-i-Islami of Muhammad Nabi Muhammadi – one of seven jihadist groups supported by Pakistan during the Afghan jihad (Qazi 2015). In 1995, Mansoor joined the Afghan Taliban movement and during the Taliban rule in Afghanistan (from 1996 to 2001), served as the Minister of Civil Aviation and Tourism.

Following the U.S.-led intervention in Afghanistan and the overthrow of Taliban, Mansoor played a significant role in restoring the battered group and reviving the insurgency against NATO and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troops in Afghanistan. Mansoor became a close confidante of Mullah Omar after 2001, often issuing orders in his name (Crilly 2015). Mansoor's power grew to the extent that he was capable of replacing rival Taliban commanders with people of his own preference. The removal of Mullah Qayum Zakir, the former military chief of the Taliban in 2014, is one such example (Qazi 2015). Mullah Qayum Zakir was furiously opposed to peace talks with the Afghan government, which Mansoor favoured.

Initially, Mansoor was recognised for his administrative qualities rather than military capabilities, but emerged as a key player in reviving the Taliban insurgency in southern Afghanistan after 2001. During the war in Afghanistan, he was involved in planning suicide attacks and military campaigns against NATO/ISAF troops. The efficacy of suicide bombings against the U.S. forces in Iraq inspired Mansoor to promote the use of suicide bombings as a military strategy in Afghanistan (Khan 2015).

Taliban under Mansoor

After being appointed as the leader, Mansoor has succeeded in winning the loyalties of most of the Taliban factions, despite a number of challenges. For instance, Mullah Omar's brother and son, Mullah Mannan and Mullah Yaqoob, pledged their allegiance to him even though they were initially opposed to Mansoor's appointment (Plucinska 2015). Mansoor's closeness with the

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Pakistani military establishment has allowed him to negotiate the long-term stay of his commanders and fighters in Pakistan (Newsweek 2015).

Moreover, he represents the majority of the Taliban factions and hence no meaningful resolution or significant settlement, whether with the U.S., Kabul or Islamabad, can take place, without his support (Dam 2015). Furthermore, Mansoor has also established his credentials as military commander. In October 2015, on Mansoor's directives, a few hundred Taliban fighters led by Mullah Salam captured northern Afghanistan's Kunduz province, forcing 5,000 Afghan National Security Forces (ANSFs) to retreat. The capture lasted for two weeks before the city was retaken from Taliban by the ANSFs.

However, the brief capture of the province consolidated Mansoor's grip over the Taliban factions. Under Mansoor, Taliban showed improved military operations – from hit-and-run guerrilla attacks to capturing and holding territory even though for a short duration. Unlike the Taliban under Mullah Umar's leadership, during which the group consisted predominantly of Afghan Pashtuns, Mansoor has opted for a more inclusive and diversified recruitment approach. The composition of Taliban fighters who participated in Kunduz operation showed a diversified ethnic and national background.

In addition to Pashtuns, the Taliban ranks included Pakistani Punjabis, Uzbeks, Chechens, Uighur Chinese, Turkic and Tajiks (Luce 2015). Moreover, since Mansoor has managed to prevail in the Taliban ranks, the commanders and fighters of the group seem inclined to work with him rather than indulge in internal squabbles (Malikyar 2015).

Challenges for Mansoor

Mansoor is based in, and operates out of Pakistan (Tolo News 2015). His physical absence from the rank and file of the group operating in the battlefields of Afghanistan has created disconnect between him and its members.

As a leader, he inherited a movement that was divided on three fronts; (a) pro-talk factions that accepted his leadership (b) anti-talk elements who were gathered around former Taliban military chief Mullah Qayum Zakir; (c) and pro-ISIS leaders interested in the establishment of a global caliphate as opposed to Taliban's localised approach to jihad. Other groups like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and some factions of the Pakistani Taliban, that have supported the Afghan Taliban have pledged allegiance to ISIS (Khama Press 2015) which has the potential to erode former's leadership in Afghanistan in particular and in the region in general.

Hence, it would appear that, despite strengthening his grip over the leadership of the Taliban, it will be difficult for Mansoor to build broad-based support for himself across the wide spectrum of Taliban factions with divergent objectives. Several Taliban leaders and factions resent the fact that Mansoor kept the news of Mullah Omar's death a secret for over two years and had been running the organisation in his stead. There are also concerns among the ranks over Mansoor appointing his relatives and friends to important positions in the group (Dawn 2015).

On 2 November 2015, a dissident faction of the Afghan Taliban parted ways from the group after failing to reconcile differences with the new Taliban leadership. The group appointed an influential Taliban commander, Mullah Mohammad Rasool as the head of a splinter group named 'High Council of Afghanistan Islamic Emirate.' The group also appointed a senior Taliban commander, Mansoor Dadullah, as its deputy. Dadullah's joining of the group is a

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big challenge to Mansoor because of his influence in southern Afghanistan's Zabul province. Dadullah is not only opposed to Mansoor but he alleges that the latter poisoned Mullah Omar to death (BBC 2015).

Similarly, another faction of the Taliban, known as Fidayee Mahaz led by Maulvi Najeebullah, has been a vocal opponent of peace talks with the Afghan government. This faction broke away from the group in 2013 after Taliban opened their office in Qatar for negotiations with the U.S. (Yousafzai 2013). In June 2015, the group sent a three-member delegation to Iraq to meet the top leadership of ISIS. The aim of the visit was to assure ISIS of all kinds of logistical support in creating a foothold in Afghanistan (Khan 2015).

Another challenge for Mansoor will be to compete with the growing influence and popularity of ISIS in Afghanistan unlike what it was during the leadership of Mullah Omar when the Taliban had undisputed leadership. Both the Al Qaeda leaders – Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri – pledged their allegiance to Mullah Omar.

However, Mansoor leadership of the Afghan Taliban comes at a time when ISIS affiliates in Afghanistan appear to have challenged Taliban's dominance both ideologically and operationally.

Inspired by ISIS' battlefield victories and effective social media propaganda, a number of Afghan Taliban factions and leaders have defected to ISIS. In reaction to growing ISIS activities, Mansoor wrote a letter to ISIS' leader, Abu Bakr

al Baghdadi, warning him to stay away from recruiting their defected leaders and fighters in Afghanistan. In October 2015, Mansoor also set up a special force of the Taliban fighters, called “Defence Units”, to counter ISIS’ growing influence in Afghanistan (Goldstein 2015).

As mentioned above, Mansoor is politically accommodative and favours political settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan over a military campaign. However, to prove his leadership credentials, he ordered large-scale attacks in Kabul and in other parts of Afghanistan after taking charge of the Taliban leadership. In August, a deadly wave of suicide bombings and terrorist attacks hit Kabul, leaving over 65 people – including three Americans – killed, and a hundred others injured (New York Times 2015).

The successes of these campaigns earned him the trust and loyalty of many disgruntled and ambivalent Taliban factions, and silenced vocal critics. However, it will still be difficult for Mansoor to convince the mid-level Taliban commanders to reconsider the option of peace talks over military operations. The pressure from mid-level Taliban commanders and fighters to go ahead with the latter option could push him to expedite the military offensive, while the Pakistani military establishment, with whom he enjoys good rapport, will pressurise him into talking to the Afghan government. The test for Mansoor will be on how he balances the demands from both sides without losing the support or confidence of either camp.

Conclusion

If the conflict in Afghanistan lingers on it will neither benefit the Afghan government nor the Afghan Taliban, a third force – likely ISIS – will most likely benefit from this impasse. Therefore, it is extremely important to resume the stalled peace process between the Afghan Taliban and the Afghan government.

At present, it seems that the Afghan Taliban has absorbed the initial shocks of their founder’s loss and has regained a sense of unity under Mullah Akhtar Mansoor. However, Mansoor is walking on an unstable rope which may test the re-established unity of the Afghan Taliban. The future of the Afghan Taliban and Afghanistan as a whole will depend on Mansoor’s negotiation and leadership skills – both in keeping his ranks calm, and in being able

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Abdul Basit is an Associate Research Fellow (ARF) at the International Center for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Singapore.

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Malik Ishaq's Legacy of Sectarian Violence in Pakistan

Sara Mahmood

The article explores the life and legacy of Malik Ishaq, the extremist anti-Shi'ite ideologue and leader of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ). It focuses on Ishaq's notoriety, and argues that sectarian violence in Pakistan will persist even after his demise.

Introduction

The killing of Malik Ishaq during a police encounter in July 2015 marked the end of a reign of violence under one of Pakistan's most notorious anti-Shi'ite leaders. Ishaq has been responsible for a large number of sectarian killings, as a member of Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), the first anti-Shi'ite extremist group in Pakistan, and as the head of the group, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), since the mid-1990s. He has masterminded large-scale attacks targeting civilians, diplomats and religious monuments, and planned a significant number of them while in custody. Ishaq was arrested on multiple occasions on charges of murder, death threats and intimidation, but the government was not able to convict him successfully. His failed conviction is due to frequent death threats to judges and witnesses that resulted in his release under the pretext of insufficient evidence.

Who was Malik Ishaq?

Ishaq was born in 1959 to a middle class family in Rahim Yar Khan, in Pakistan's rural Punjab province and left school at a young age. Over the years Ishaq was increasingly inspired by the anti-Shi'ite leanings of Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, the Sunni extremist cleric and founder of the Sunni sectarian outfit, the Sipah-e-Sahaba (SSP) (Khattak 2013). The SSP was founded against the backdrop of the Saudi-Iran proxy war in the 1980s that

emerged in reaction to the Iranian Revolution in 1979, and the pro-Sunni 'Islamisation' policies of Pakistan military dictator Zia-ul-Haq.

To counter Shi'ite Muslim influence in Pakistan, SSP carried out violent sectarian campaigns (Notezai 2015). In his sermons, Jhangvi actively spoke against the Shi'ites and the Iranians, including Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini. Ishaq met Jhangvi in 1989 and became increasingly influenced by his anti-Shi'ite teachings, eventually joining SSP. While with SSP, Ishaq participated in violent sectarian campaigns against the Shi'ites. He also immersed himself in religious literature and books written by Islamic scholars, and frequently quoted them in order to assert differences between the Shi'ites and the Sunnis (Khattak 2013).

From Sipah-e-Sahaba (SSP) to Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ)

Jhangvi died in 1990. In 1996, his protégé, Ishaq, along with other extremist Sunni militants, Riaz Basra and Akram Lohari, set up Lashkar-e-Jhangvi ('Army of Jhangvi' or LeJ) to continue the movement against the Shi'ites (Qarni 2015). The group, which is named after Ishaq's pedagogue, is pro-Sunni and regards Shi'ites as non-Muslims (Georgy 2012). According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), from 1989 to 2015, approximately 9,800 civilians, mostly Shi'ite Muslims, have been killed in Pakistan due to sectarian violence. A large number of these deaths are attributed to Ishaq's group. Presently, the group continues to maintain its stronghold in southern Punjab, and has a significant following in the Balochistan and Sindh provinces. Under Ishaq's leadership, LeJ is said to have closely aligned itself with Al Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban (Roggio 2014), and is known to have carried out the 2011 bombing targeting the Abu Fazal shrine in Kabul, which killed close to 63 Shi'ites (Nordland 2011).

Malik Ishaq's Notoriety

In 2011, Ishaq openly claimed responsibility for killing more than 100 Shi'ites (Munawar 2011). In 2014, Ishaq was arrested for delivering hate speeches against Shi'ites in a mosque with close to 1,000 people in attendance. Reportedly, during the time he was in prison, authorities feared his power and wrath extensively and ensured no Shi'ite officials were put on duty near his cell (Shah 2014). Moreover, Ishaq's ability to bring other Sunnis to his cause is attributed to

“ According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), from 1989 to 2015, approximately 9,800 civilians, mostly Shi'ite Muslims, have been killed in Pakistan due to sectarian violence. ”

his oratory skills, religiosity and piousness. During his time in prison, Ishaq attracted quite a few policemen to his anti-Shi'ite ideas, and they in turn granted him access to cellular phones. This permitted Ishaq to maintain contact with his group's leadership and mastermind large-scale attacks even while in custody (Shah 2014). These attacks included the 2009 attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore; the 2012 shooting of 25 Shi'ites in Gilgit-Baltistan; and the 2013 bombing that killed 67 and injured 167 Hazara Shi'ites in Quetta (Khattak 2013). The Hazara Shi'ites is a religious and ethnic minority community, situated in parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Moreover, after being released in 2011, Ishaq was kept under house arrest by the authorities to ensure a reduction in anti-Shi'ite attacks. However, soon after his release, violent attacks against Shi'ites soared, with LeJ becoming increasingly violent. For example, LeJ members carried out raids on buses carrying passengers, and would check their identity cards to identify Shi'ites before killing them (Georgy 2012).

Ishaq's Judicial Battles

Due to his involvement in anti-Shi'ite attacks and hate sermons against the Shi'ite sect, Ishaq was arrested on multiple occasions. In fact, Ishaq was arrested in 1997 for 44 cases of murder and released on bail in 2011 after 14 years of imprisonment. However, Ishaq had been acquitted from 34 of these 44 cases due to lack of evidence (Khattak 2013). Lack of evidence against Ishaq could be due to the murders and disappearances of witnesses along with their

families. Ishaq was also known for issuing blatant threats to the judges, which forced them to drop his case. During one particular hearing, the judge – fearing the consequences – attempted to conceal his face from Ishaq. Ishaq then mockingly repeated the names of the judge's children. The judge immediately decided to dismiss the case against Ishaq due to the threat implied in Ishaq's statement mentioning the names of the judge's children (Shah 2014).

In 1997, Ishaq was accused of killing 12 Shi'ites during a *majlis* (Shi'ite religious procession). A key witness in the case, along with three other men, identified Ishaq as the murderer, prompting Ishaq's response that 'dead men can't talk'. Shortly after the hearing, five witnesses and a few of their family members were killed (Munawar 2011). Ishaq was to appear in court for involvement in the bombing of an Iranian Culture Centre in Multan in 1997. Although he was initially convicted by a judge named Bashir Ahmed Bhatti, the Supreme Court eventually overruled the conviction due to the lack of substantial evidence. In 2007, Bhatti was due to hear another case against Ishaq, but was killed in a bomb blast on his way to court (Munawar 2011).

Ishaq stated that he always had strong faith in the inability of the judicial system to convict him. Despite being arrested multiple times he was released shortly afterwards. This was a result of the fear Ishaq garnered due to frequent death threats, disappearances and killings of judges, witnesses and family members.

Controversy over Ishaq's killing

In July 2015, Ishaq was detained by local authorities and was being transported in a police convoy en route to Muzaffargarh city, when his supporters attacked the convoy, in an attempt to free him. In the ensuing gunfight, Ishaq and his two sons were killed, along with 11 of the attackers (BBC 2015). There are allegations that Ishaq's killing was a staged encounter by the civilian government to eliminate a terrorist leader that the judiciary was unable to prosecute.

More importantly, Ishaq's elimination was believed to be an outcome of the government's crackdown on sectarian outfits and their leaders under the ambit of the newly implemented National Action Plan (NAP), which was introduced in December 2014. Specifically, his killing has been linked to his intention to join the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS). Authorities had uncovered pro-ISIS literature and

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pamphlets days before he was killed (Yousaf 2015). It is likely that the security establishment foresaw Ishaq's massive following and the potential for his supporters to rally behind his decision to join ISIS and thus, killed him to prevent such a scenario.

Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) after Ishaq

Ishaq's legacy as one of the most feared terrorist leaders in Pakistan will remain after his death. However this does not address the threat of LeJ nor does it indicate its end. In the past, LeJ had continued to operate undeterred despite the deaths of two other founding members – Riaz Basra and Akram Lahori.

On the other hand, killing of Malik Ishaq has contributed to a surge in protests against the state and reprisal attacks targeting the Shi'ites. This was evident from the violent protests at Rahim Yar Khan, the burial site of Ishaq and his two sons. A group of 10 LeJ members also targeted a police check-post in Gujrat and a Shi'ite mosque to avenge the death of their leader (Boone 2015). In August 2015, the Home Minister for Punjab, Shuja Khanzada, was killed in a bomb blast near Attock, in a joint attack led by LeJ and a Pakistani Taliban splinter group, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar. Khanzada was responsible for the arrests of more than 700 militants and was a frontrunner in the battle against sectarianism within the country (Gishkori 2015). Khanzada's death marked the first high-profile killing for the

current government in its struggle to reduce and curb sectarian violence. It is likely that further retaliatory attacks will be conducted by members of LeJ in the wake of Ishaq's death, given that Ishaq had amassed a dedicated following during his time as the leader of LeJ.

Looking Forward

Ishaq's death and the subsequent violence represent an important lesson for Pakistan. It is likely that Ishaq will be replaced by a similar ideologue preaching intolerance. Moreover, Ishaq's death does not negate the existence of deeply rooted anti-Shi'ite sentiments in the country. In fact, according to a Pew Research Centre poll, close to 50% of the Sunnis in Pakistan perceive the Shi'ites as non-Muslims (Haider 2012). Considering the deeply entrenched intolerance of Shi'ites, sectarian violence will continue with the involvement of other sectarian groups such as Jundullah, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar and the Pakistani Taliban.

Ishaq's notoriety as the leader of LeJ relates to his utter lack of fear of being convicted. This demonstrates the shortcomings of the Pakistani criminal-justice system. Given the inability to prosecute militants like Ishaq is tied to the lack of protection granted to witnesses and judges. Therefore, the state needs to bring significant reforms in its criminal-justice system to deal firmly with all cases of militancy in the country.

Sara Mahmood is a Research Analyst at the International Center for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Singapore.

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Hadi Al-Amiri's Grip on Iraq

Aida Arosoaie

Hadi Al-Amiri, the leader of the Badr Organisation and a close ally of Iran, is an infamous Iraqi military commander and politician. The emergence of ISIS offered Al-Amiri the opportunity to become an indispensable tool to Iraq's security and to continue the sectarian violence that he has been perpetrating ever since the U.S. invasion of Iraq which undermines the security and stability of the country.

Introduction

Hadi Al-Amiri is a well-known military commander in Iraq. He was born in 1954 in Diyala Province in Iraq, but spent a large part of his life in Iran. He began his military career as a member of the Supreme Islamic Council of Iraq in Tehran fighting against Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq War. Hadi Al-Amiri enjoys close friendships with senior commanders of the Quds Forces, the most notorious of them being Qassem Suleimani. In an interview in Baghdad in 2014, Hadi Al-Amiri remarked affectionately: "I love Qassem Suleimani! He is my dearest friend" (Filkins, 2013). Al-Amiri's militia, the Badr Organisation is believed to have been the closest Shi'ite militia to the government in Tehran.

In the aftermath of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Hadi Al-Amiri returned to Iraq in an attempt to capitalise on the power vacuum following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. As the leader of Badr Organisation, he engaged in brutal sectarian violence. The U.S. intervention in Iraq also helped him and his fellow members in infiltrating the Iraqi political and military establishment (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2014). The emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) triggered a swift military response in Iraq. Leading the military effort against ISIS is Hadi Al-Amiri and

his Badr Organisation. With political and financial support from Tehran, he managed to secure the Ministry of Interior. However, there are serious concerns that Hadi Al-Amiri and his Badr Organisation might end up in deepening Iraq's instability due to their involvement in violent sectarian campaigns against the Sunnis in Iraq (New York Times 2015).

Al-Amiri's ascension to power

Hadi Al-Amiri began his military career during the Iran-Iraq War. A strong opponent of Saddam Hussein, Al-Amiri entered the war as a senior official of the Supreme Islamic Council of Iraq in Tehran. Throughout the war he held various positions, such as Battalion Commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Ground Force, Intelligence Official and, lastly, Commander of Operations of the 9th Badr Corps.

The Badr Corps, the initial name of the Badr Organisation, is usually deemed as the oldest Iranian proxy in Iraq and the most powerful paramilitary group. Formed in 1983, the group served as the military wing of SCIRI (Counter Extremism Project 2015). In 1991 Baker al-Hakim, a senior Iraqi Shi'ite cleric and then the leader of SCIRI, asked Al-Amiri to lead the military operations against Saddam Hussein inside Iraq. From 1991 onwards, Hadi Al-Amiri carried out a stellar ascension within the ranks of the Badr Corps. He became the Chief of Staff of the 9th Badr Corps, later the Deputy Commander of the 9th Badr Corps and, in 2002, the Commander of the 9th Badr (Staff TFS 2014).

After the Iran-Iraq War, the organisation operated mostly from Iran, moving back to Iraq in the aftermath of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Immediately after the fall of Saddam Hussein, Hadi Al-Amiri and the Badr Corps broke away from SCIRI, rebranding the group as a non-violent party under the name of "The Badr Organisation of Reconstruction and Development." In spite of its political rhetoric, the Badr Organisation engaged in various episodes

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of brutal violence against the Iraqi Sunnis (Martin 2015).

Badr Organisation's sectarian campaigns continued well into the U.S. occupation. In fact, in 2009 it was revealed that members of Badr had infiltrated the Iraqi security forces and were torturing and executing Sunnis (George 2014). Furthermore, members of the Badr had started infiltrating the political establishment itself.

In 2010, Hadi Al-Amiri was appointed as the Minister of Transport by Nouri al-Maliki. During his tenure, he engaged in rampant corruption with blatant abuse of authority. An infamous example is the forced return of an Iraqi Airways flight en route to Baghdad from Beirut because his son had missed the flight (George 2014). Also, Hadi Al-Amiri authorised Iran to use the Iraq's airspace in order to supply Bashar al-Assad with weaponry for fighting the Syrian opposition, despite vehement international criticism.

Hadi Al-Amiri's political clout lasted well beyond Nouri al-Maliki's era. In 2014, Badr Organisation participated in the parliamentary elections winning 22 seats out of a 328 total. This victory qualified Hadi Al-Amiri as a potential candidate for the Ministry of Interior (MOI). However, due to unknown reasons, position was given to one of Hadi al-Amiri's junior colleagues in Badr -

Mohammed Ghabban. It was widely believed that the nomination of Ghabban was merely formal and, in actuality, the Ministry of Interior is under Al-Abadi's command (Morris 2015). Moreover, the current Prime Minister of Iraq, Haider Al-Abadi, had entrusted Al-Amiri with the command over Iraq's police and army in Diyala, and with the control over the Iraqi Army's 20th Battalion (Parker 2015).

The emergence of ISIS inadvertently assisted Hadi Al-Amiri in expanding his military clout. In October 2014, the Badr Organisation was leading the Operation Ashura for the liberation of Jurf al-Sakhar, a city near Baghdad then held by ISIS. Al-Amiri later claimed the victory for the Badr Organisation and argued that, by securing Jurf al-Sakhar, Badr had succeeded in securing Baghdad (George 2014). Badr also played a major role in retaking Tikrit from ISIS in March 2015 and it is also leading the operation of retaking Ramadi which was seized by ISIS in May 2015.

The downside of Al-Amiri's success

Hadi Al-Amiri's military success against ISIS does have a downside. Under Al-Amiri's leadership, Badr has carried out some of the bloodiest sectarian campaigns against the Iraqi Sunnis. There are concerns that the actions of Al-Amiri's militia and those alike might exacerbate sectarianism and lead to further unrest and instability in the country (Knights 2015).

A State Department cable leaked in 2009 revealed that Al-Amiri had ordered the torture and execution of around 2,000 Iraqi Sunnis (Morris 2015). In 2005, the then Minister of Interior, Bayan Jabr, recruited Badr members for the Iraqi security forces who would later be charged with gruesome sectarian violence. One example is the kidnapping of 36 Sunnis from Baghdad whom Badr members tortured, killed and had their bodies dumped. Later, in November 2005, a U.S. military unit discovered a prison in Jadriya, Baghdad, wherein prisoners had severed signs of torture. In February 2006,

“ Under Al-Amiri's leadership, Badr has carried out some of the bloodiest sectarian campaigns against the Iraqi Sunnis. ”

18 police commandoes were found to be running a kidnapping ring. The prison was functioning under the Minister of Interior and Badr members were controlling the kidnapping ring (Musings on Iraq 2015).

Badr members were also reported to have carried out targeted killings of former Ba'ath members in coordination with Iranians. In October 2004, Badr Organisation was accused by Iraq's national intelligence agency for killing intelligence officials on orders from Iran. Later, following the 2005 parliamentary elections in January, members of Badr initiated a string of assassinations of former Ba'athists who were former members of Saddam's intelligence agencies and his armed forces.

In addition to the targeted sectarian killings and the disdain for former Ba'athists, the Badr Organisation also engaged in intra-sectarian violence. From 2005 until 2008, Badr members regularly clashed with the militia of Moqtada al-Sadr, Jaysh al-Mahdi, another powerful Shi'ite militia group. In one incident, Nouri al-Maliki had to send 2,300 army and police forces to secure Amarah in Maysan and stop the bloodshed between the two groups (Musings on Iraq 2015).

Following the emergence of ISIS, Badr Organisation's sectarian killings have reached abominable proportions. In August 2014, the militia was accused of hanging corpses of Sunnis from bridges and light poles in Khalis and Baquba. They justified their actions saying that

the victims were ISIS members (National Council of Resistance of Iran 2014). Human Rights Watch published various reports regarding the systematic torturing and execution of Iraqi Sunnis at the hand of the Shi'ite militias. One example is a report released in July 2014 claiming that Hadi Al-Amiri had commanded attacks in the Tal Afar and Jumarkhe prisons, killing 51 and 43 Sunni prisoners, respectively (Human Rights Watch 2014).

Consequences of Hadi Al-Amiri's actions

A potential consequence of Al-Amiri's actions could be thwarting the political efforts against ISIS. Hadi Al-Amiri's actions are in complete dissonance with the Iraqi national identity that Haider Al-Abadi is seeking to promote. Rather, his actions indicate that he is fighting a battle for the Iraqi Shi'ites under the command of Iran. This was reinforced through a comment made in August 2014 by a Badr militiaman in Diyala: "When I withdraw my forces now the Sunnis will come back and they will become an incubator for ISIS again. When I liberate an area from ISIS why do I have to give it back to them? Either I erase it or settle Shia in it" (Abdul-Ahad 2014).

Moreover, the sectarian bloodbath being perpetrated by Hadi Al-Amiri and his Badr Organisation could be a boost in the recruitment efforts of ISIS. Hadi Al-Amiri is assisting an Iraqi re-enactment of what Kilcullen defined the "accidental guerilla" phenomenon in Afghanistan. David Kilcullen coined the expression in his book - "The Accidental Guerilla", referring to people in Afghanistan who end up taking up arms in response to an "enemy-centric" counter-terrorist policy which wrongfully intruded their spaces and targeted them based on a misconceived association with the Taliban (Kilcullen 2009). Following this logic, Hadi Al-Amiri's actions might facilitate ISIS's recruitment process.

Additionally, the impact of intra-sectarian power-struggle and related violence being encouraged by Hadi Al-Amiri cannot be underestimated. Badr Organisation faces competition with the other

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Shi'ite forces like Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq and Kata'ib Hezbollah, both of which also receive support from Iran, for the leadership in Iraq, particularly in view of the ISIS threat.

Conclusion

Hadi Al-Amiri is one of the most prominent military leaders and politicians in Iraq. He is at the forefront of the military efforts against ISIS and he is also one of Tehran's closest allies in Iraq. However, his sectarian outlook represents a threat for Iraq's political stability and security. The main counter to Al-Amiri's growing powers is current Prime-Minister Al-Abadi's ability in implementing his reforms. On 9 August 2015 Haider Al-Abadi promulgated a series of bold reforms in response to a series of protests in Baghdad, Erbil and Basra. The reforms include ending the quota system in government positions in order to boost a more cross-sectarian milieu and military policies and enforcing accountability in governance.

Moreover, as part of the strategy to retake Ramadi, the capital of Anbar Province, the Prime Minister is looking to recruit a large number of Sunnis and tribal members into the ranks of the Popular Mobilization Front (PMU), a special unit formed to combat ISIS. These reforms, if successfully implemented, could calm the

sectarian discontent which is at the root of inefficiency associated with the Iraqi government. However, considering how Badr Organisation have fully infiltrated the military-political establishment, together with other powerful Shi'ite militias, it seems difficult to be optimistic about the future of Iraq.

Aida Arosoaie is Research Analyst at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Singapore.

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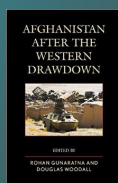
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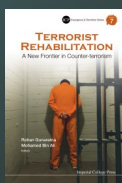


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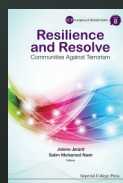
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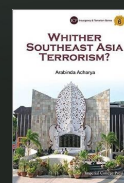
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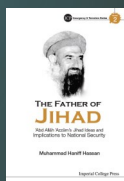
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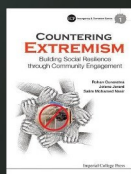
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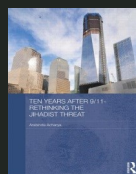
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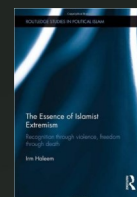
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Nanyang Technological University

Block S4, Level B4, 50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798

Tel: + 65 6790 6982 | Fax: +65 6794 0617 | www.rsis.edu.sg