

Another Victim of British-Saudi Terror

by Ramtanu Maitra

July 24—The impact of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in the Winter of 2001 has been felt all around the region, but the worst victims were, undoubtedly, Pakistan and Tajikistan. In many ways, however, Pakistan was responsible for its own victimization; it has been deeply involved in Afghan affairs since the 1980s, and did not want to disentangle itself, for its own geopolitical reasons. Despite the chaos, violence, and loss of lives that followed and continue, Pakistan remains engaged fully pursuing that policy, with no end in sight.

But, such is not the case with Tajikistan. Tajikistan, which borders northern Afghanistan, was never involved in Afghan affairs in the way that Pakistan was. Yet, the outside actors, pushed in from Afghanistan and Pakistan, have weakened Tajikistan's security significantly. In recent weeks, the security situation reached a new level of threat, when, on July 16, at the Blue Lake checkpoint, 130 kilometers east of the capital, Dushanbe, Tajik forces killed five Russian nationals, four of whom arrived last April from St. Petersburg, while the other is from Dagestan. Subsequently, the Tajik Interior Minister Abdurahim Qahhorov, told reporters that five other Russians, who are suspected of involvement in the drug business and terrorism, were detained in Dushanbe.

Russian Worries

In the first six months of 2009, Qahhorov said, Tajik forces arrested 19 suspected members of the banned Hizb-ut Tahrir (HuT), an international Wahhabi (Sunni fundamentalist) group, headquartered in Britain, and eight suspected members of the Islamic Movement for Uzbekistan (IMU), the armed wing of the HuT. The IMU is involved in a violent campaign to gain control of the Central Asian Republics with the ostensible objective of setting up an Islamic Caliphate.

The rapid deterioration of the security situation

in Tajikistan has not gone unnoticed. "The European Union is highly concerned about the situation in Pakistan and its reflection on Tajikistan," said Amb. Pierre Morel, the EU's special representative in Central Asia, at a news conference in Dushanbe, on July 14. "We support the current politics of [Tajikistan] directed towards the eradication of armed terrorist groups and drug traffic."

In an attempt to bring calm back to the border, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, Afghan President Hamid Karzai, Russian President Dmitri Medvedev, and Tajik President Emomali Rahmon met in Dushanbe on July 28. In a strongly worded joint statement, following the meeting, the four leaders emphasized their concern about "the growth of illegal drug trafficking, as one of the main sources for the financing of terrorist activity" in the region. They urged "the international community to take additional measures, in cooperation with the Afghan government, for a resolute fight against the drug threat."

In addition, Russia is now expressing a great deal of concern over these developments. In the past few months, Russia has become proactive on Afghanistan, especially after the five Russian militants were killed at a military checkpoint near the Tajik-Afghan border July 16. The incident brought to the fore the danger of a pan-Islamic militant network in Central Asia, posing a direct threat to Russia's interests. Perhaps because of these growing concerns, on July 22, Moscow sought security cooperation with New Delhi to fight the growing regional threat from the Taliban and allied Islamic militants, when External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna met



UNODC

The explosion of opium poppy production in Afghanistan—more than 8,000 tons in 2008—has had deadly effects in Tajikistan, through which the drugs are carried to Western markets. Shown: a poppy field in Afghanistan

his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, in Thailand, at the post-ministerial meeting of ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations).

The Taliban Connection

Five days before the July 16 incident, former Emergency Situations Minister (1997-2006) Mirzo Ziyoyev, who served in the 1990s as the commander of the Tajik opposition forces during the country's civil war, was killed. The Interior Ministry said he was killed by militants when he attempted to get them to lay down their weapons.

Initially, Dushanbe had said that the Russians were drug runners. However, following rumor and speculation among the Tajik press and foreign diplomatic community, the government has now acknowledged, for the first time, that its enemies in the Rasht Valley may be more than just drug smugglers. A written statement issued by the Tajik Interior Ministry after the press conference includes a dramatic claim: that the group Ziyoyev had joined is led by an operative of the Taliban-linked IMU, and that the group has been smuggling drugs through Rasht to finance "terrorism."

In other words, Ziyoyev had become a member of the drug-running terrorist outfit, IMU. In addition, it has been pointed out that the IMU used Rasht as a base to carry out attacks against Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in 1999 and 2000, but was eventually forced to relocate to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

Since the Bush Administration unleashed its so-called war on terror, in 2001, two major developments began to unfold in Afghanistan, with the impact felt severely in Tajikistan. One, was an explosion of opium production, which reached the official figure of 8,200 tons in 2008. Afghanistan also became one of the leading hashish producers during this period. Much of the opium, in its raw form, or in its refined form as heroin, passes through Tajikistan, seeking the western European market.

A recent report issued by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) points out that an estimated 15% of opiates and 20% of heroin produced in Afghanistan is smuggled through Central Asia—mainly Tajikistan—en route to Russia, Europe, and China. According to UNODC estimates, up to 100 tons of Afghan heroin is smuggled through Tajikistan every year. Narcotics seizures by Tajik law-enforcement agencies have been steadily increasing since 2001. Over six tons of narcotic drugs was interdicted in Tajikistan in 2008, and the volume is likely to reach seven tons this year. Di-

rectly related to this massive drug trafficking, is the criminalization of Tajik society, just as the process has criminalized other Central Asian countries. This prolific drug trafficking has brought in the powerful Russian mafia to help control the narcotics distribution system.

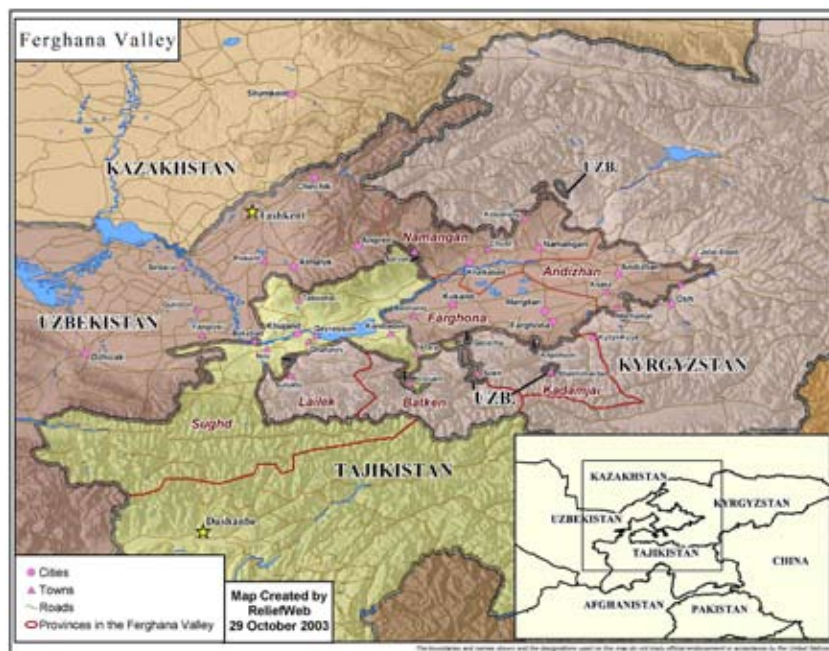
British-Saudi-Pakistan Nexus

The other development since the declaration of the war on terror, was the consolidation of various anti-U.S. forces under a jihadi banner, controlled by Britain, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. The way it works is as follows: A large number of Islamic jihadis were unleashed in Central Asia, particularly in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, but also in other Central Asian countries. These Islamic preachers gathered under the banner of Hizb ut-Tahrir (HuT), and propagated an orthodox Wahhabi version of Sunni Islam, while remaining headquartered in Britain. The preachers function under the control of the British intelligence services, MI5 and MI6. The objective of the group's British controllers is to Islamicize Central Asia, to weaken the potential Russian and Chinese control over this mineral-resource-and oil-and-gas-rich area, and to pose a serious threat to Russia's southern flank.

Russia already faces serious problems with the Muslim population in Dagestan and Chechen. And, China has now been challenged by the Uighurs, who are Muslims of Turkic stock, in Xinjiang province in western China. Beijing claims that the Uighurs have been encouraged by outside forces, to assert their ethnic identity, with the intent of breaking away from China.

It has been noted that although the HuT is a peaceful organization based in Britain, and a few other countries, most, if not all, of the members of the terrorist outfit IMU were recruited from the HuT. The IMU has a very strong presence in Kyrgyzstan and in the Ferghana Valley, where the borders of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan meet.

While the HuT is harbored in Britain, and works under the thumb of British intelligence, funding for these preachers operating in Central Asia does not come from London, but from Riyadh and Kuwait City. These Wahhabi preachers hand out free food, free Qurans, and simple white clothing to the impoverished multitudes in Tajikistan, bringing them into the fold. Riyadh also funds the arming and training of those who are recruited by the IMU. The training and arming of these recruits used to take place under the guidance of Pakistani intelligence, the ISI, and special services in Afghanistan,



UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; ReliefWeb

The armed wing of the British-based Hizb-ut Tahrir (HuT), the IMU, has a strong presence in the Ferghana Valley, where the borders of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan meet (see map). The IMU is involved in a violent campaign to gain control of the Central Asian Republics, with the aim of establishing an Islamic caliphate.

when the Taliban was in power there. Since the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, such training and arming takes place in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). It is also where the Uighur terrorists, funded from the war chest provided by Saudi Arabia, are trained by the same Pakistani outfits.

Boys Sent Home To Kill

Pakistan trains the terrorists for different reasons than those behind the British and Saudi support for them. Pakistan's intent is to use the militants as its proxies to gain control of Afghanistan. During the civil war in Afghanistan (1992-96), Pakistan organized the training of the militants, and used these jihadi mercenaries to gain a military victory for the Taliban, securing political control over Kabul. Pakistan continues to train and harbor the terrorists because the Pakistani establishment is convinced that the foreign troops will leave Afghanistan at some point, and at that time, the jihadis will again help it to take control of Afghanistan. This objective is referred to as securing "strategic depth" against its perceived primary enemy, India.

The rapid deterioration of Central Asian security, particularly in the countries that converge on the Ferghana Valley, has been attributed by some analysts to the mili-

tary measures undertaken by the Pakistani Army in recent days, under pressure from the Obama Administration. Reports from Tajikistan indicate that, with the increasing military pressure by U.S. troops in Afghanistan, and Pakistan mounting security operations along its border with Afghanistan, fighters from Russia and ex-Soviet republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia are returning home. And while that trend decreases the number of foreigners fighting American soldiers in Afghanistan, it is almost a certainty that the process will result in the exportation of more violence into Central Asia in the coming days.

The movement of militants across the Tajik-Afghan border poses a serious threat to China's volatile western Xinjiang region. Some analysts have concluded that the July 5 violence in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang province, could have been triggered by the Uighur terrorists sent back home from Pakistan.

According to reports made available in early July by the local and regional media, a Tajik Civil War-era field commander, Abdullo Rakhimov (also known as Mullo Abdullo), returned to Tajikistan with a large group of militant supporters, after allegedly spending the last nine years with Taliban allies in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Although the Tajik authorities have repeatedly denied that the warlord had returned to the country, an ongoing large-scale military operation in Mullo Abdullo's home region in eastern Tajikistan, with unexplained casualties among the Tajik military, seems to support the claims of the rebel's return.

Another signal of the migration of Central Asian terrorists from Pakistan, is the outburst of violence in the nearby town of Kunduz in northern Afghanistan. After years of relative stability, following the 2001 U.S.-led invasion, Kunduz has suddenly seen a surge of violence believed to be Taliban-fuelled. A senior U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity, during a recent visit to Central Asia, told Agence France Presse that Washington was closely monitoring the outflow of militants since the beginning of Pakistan's operations in the Swat Valley last May. "I think we are seeing, looking globally, that al-Qaeda is relocating its forces into the rest of the world," he said.