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THE BATTLE FOR PAKISTAN

Militancy and Conflict in South Waziristan

MANSUR KHAN MAHSUD, APRIL 2010

The security situation in South Waziristan took a drastic turn when U.S. and NATO forces invaded Afghanistan in October 2001, in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington and the subsequent refusal by the Taliban government to hand over the al-Qaeda leader behind the attacks, Osama bin Laden. Thousands from the Afghan Taliban, the Arab al-Qaeda, and their foreign affiliates--such as groups of Uzbeks, Chechens, and Tajiks--came to South Waziristan looking for refuge and bases to continue their fight against the American and NATO forces occupying Afghanistan.

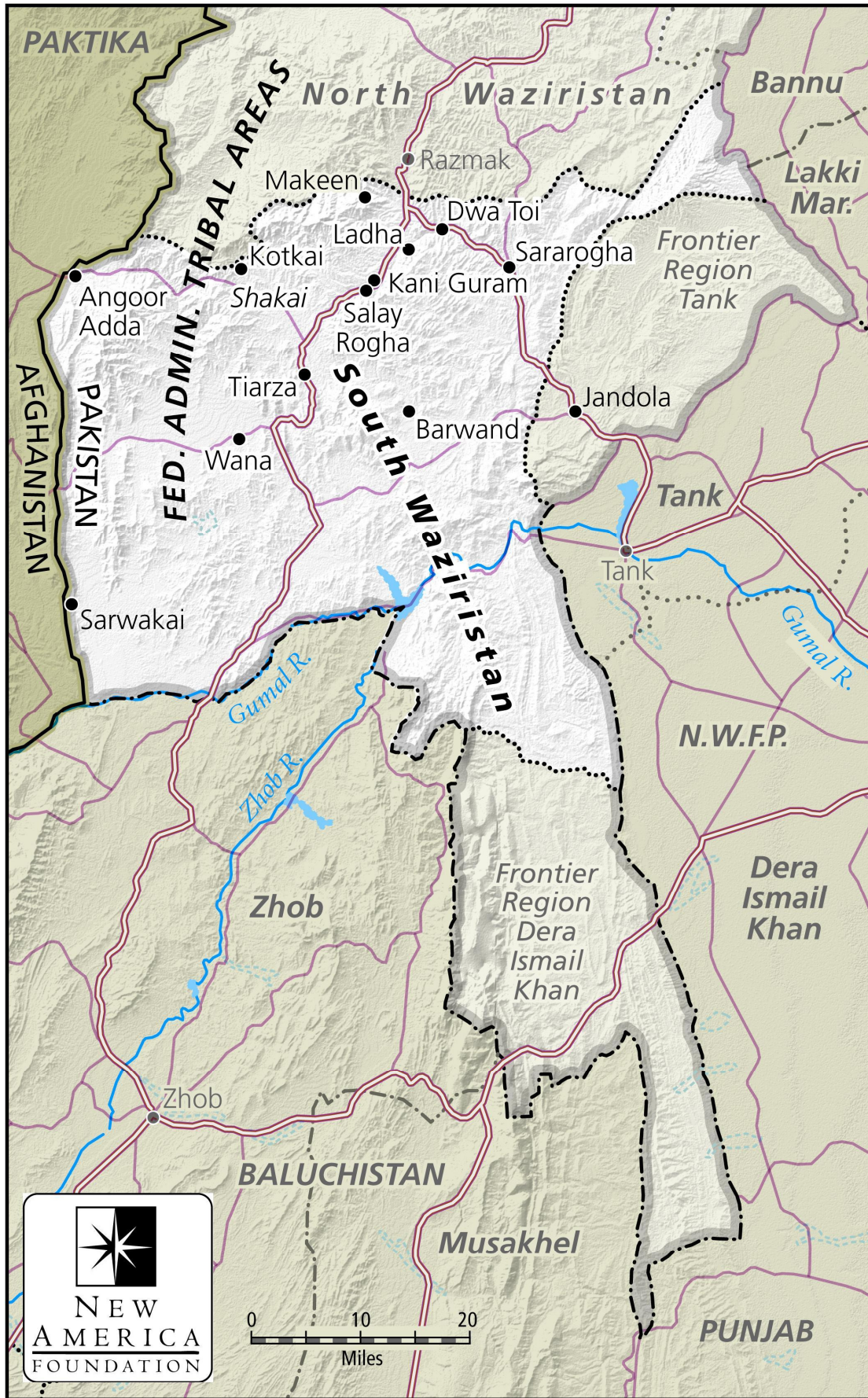
Of all the tribal agencies and districts of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of northwest Pakistan, few have assumed as much importance for the United States since September 11, 2001, as South Waziristan. Comprising 6,619 square kilometers, or about 2,555 square miles, South Waziristan is the country's southernmost tribal agency and the largest by area.

Following the establishment of Pakistan in 1947, peace largely prevailed in South Waziristan, with the exception of a revolt by a mullah named Noor Mohammad Wazir in the years of 1975-6 which was crushed by a military operation. However, the 1978 revolt against the communist coup in neighboring Afghanistan and the subsequent Afghan jihad against invading Soviet occupation forces heavily affected the broader Waziristan region. Tens of thousands of Afghans flooded into refugee camps in Waziristan, some of them training camps for the Afghan *mujahideen*, or holy warriors.¹ These refugees told the local people about how

the Soviets and their Afghan allies insulted and brutalized the Muslim Afghan population, sowing hatred for the Russians and their puppet government in Kabul. Many young men from Waziristan went to Afghanistan to fight against the Soviets, a tendency supported by both the Pakistani and American intelligence services, which launched a propaganda program against the Soviet Union to recruit fighters.

The people of South Waziristan are almost all orthodox Sunni Muslims, and a great majority of them are illiterate. Many follow the teachings of clerics who were financially supported by the Pakistani government during the anti-Soviet war.² In this period, these religious leaders in Pakistan's tribal regions opened dozens of *madrassas*, or Islamic schools, where young Mehsud and Wazir tribesmen were indoctrinated to participate in jihad. The *madrassas* were supported financially by the governments of Persian Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia, boosting

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MAP BY GENE THORP OF CARTOGRAPHIC CONCEPTS, INC.

the stature and authority of the clerics in South Waziristan.³ Most of these madrassas were connected to Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F), an Islamist political party founded in the 1950s that is popular in the tribal areas.⁴ After the Soviet Union withdrew its troops from Afghanistan in 1989, many of the FATA tribesmen who took part in the fight brought the jihadist ideology back to their home towns in Pakistan. Some of them traveled to Kashmir to fight against the Indian occupation in the predominantly Muslim state. As the Taliban began gaining strength in Afghanistan in 1994, many of the FATA jihadists joined the Afghan movement.⁵

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When the Taliban formed a government in Afghanistan in 1996, it was initially somewhat popular in South Waziristan. Tribesmen were impressed with the movement's ability to enforce strict Islamic rule over Afghanistan and to ensure security in the areas it controlled.⁶ Some veterans of the anti-Soviet jihad maintained links with the Afghan Taliban, slowly introducing the Taliban's ideology to South Waziristan, but in general between 1996 and fall 2001, residents of the agency didn't have much contact with Afghanistan's Taliban rulers.

The security situation in South Waziristan took a drastic turn when U.S. and NATO forces invaded Afghanistan in October 2001, in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington and the subsequent refusal by the Taliban government to hand over the al-Qaeda leader behind the attacks, Osama bin Laden. Thousands from the Afghan Taliban, the Arab al-Qaeda, and their foreign affiliates--such as groups of Uzbeks, Chechens, and Tajiks--came to South Waziristan looking for refuge and bases to continue their fight against the American and NATO forces occupying Afghanistan.⁷ The

local tribes, sympathetic to the cause, provided shelter and assistance to the fighters, while local militants who were affiliated with the Afghan Taliban government before September 11--such as Abdullah Mehsud, Baitullah Mehsud, Nek Muhammad, Haji Sharif, and Haji Omar--began to organize local Taliban groups across South Waziristan.⁸

Nek Muhammad, a member of the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe who had joined the Taliban movement in 1993 when he was just 18, was the first head of the Taliban in South Waziristan. He later fought against the Northern Alliance, and fought near Bagram air base outside Kabul after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan.⁹ After the fall of the Taliban government in Kabul, Nek Muhammad returned to Wana, South Waziristan in December 2001 where he began to organize local Taliban fighters. Having gathered several hundred local Wazirs, he began to launch cross-border attacks in 2003 on American and NATO forces in Afghanistan with the support of veteran mujahideen commanders such as Haji Omar, Haji Sharif, and Maulvi Abbas.¹⁰ Nek Muhammad also provided refuge for fleeing members of the Afghan Taliban, Arab al-Qaeda fighters, and the Uzbeks of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan led by Tahir Yuldashev.

Under pressure from the U.S. government to act against the mix of militants proliferating in Waziristan and attacking U.S. forces in Afghanistan,¹¹ the Pakistani military launched its first major operation in Wana in 2004, putting 7,000 troops against the local Taliban fighters and their foreign allies.¹² Nek Muhammad led the militants, assisted by Baitullah Mehsud, Abdullah Mehsud, and their supporters. After several weeks of intense fighting, the Pakistani government was forced to make a peace deal with Nek Muhammad's forces. Under the so-called Shakai agreement, Nek Muhammad agreed to lay down his arms and "register" foreign militants living in the area, while the government promised funding to the local Taliban so the fighters could pay their debts to al-Qaeda.¹³ The deal promptly broke down, and Nek Muhammad was killed a few weeks later by a suspected U.S. drone missile while

giving an interview by satellite phone to a foreign news organization.¹⁴ The charismatic Nek Muhammad became something of a hero in South Waziristan, the one who defeated the mighty Pakistani army, and thousands from the Mehsud and Wazir tribes alike flocked to South Waziristan to join the Taliban fighters who were already there.

After the death of Nek Muhammad, Haji Omar became the leader of the Wana Taliban in South Waziristan, and he continued to support the presence of Uzbeks and other foreign fighters there¹⁵. The Uzbeks believed it was more important to fight against the Pakistani government and military than to attack U.S. and NATO targets across the border in Afghanistan. This put them in conflict with the Taliban commander Mullah Nazir, who expelled them and their supporters, Haji Omar and Haji Sharif, by April 2007. The Uzbeks then sought refuge in the Mehsud-dominated areas of South Waziristan, where Abdullah Mehsud and Baitullah Mehsud had organized their own anti-Pakistan, anti-Western Taliban movements.¹⁶ These groups also began to take part in cross-border attacks on U.S. and NATO forces and their Afghan allies from inside Pakistan.¹⁷

Emergence of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)

Over the years, these local Taliban militant groups became so powerful that in December 2007 they formed the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), an umbrella organization of dozens of Taliban groups throughout Pakistan, under the initial leadership of Baitullah Mehsud. Maulana Hafiz Gul Bahadur, a North Waziristan-based commander, was elected the first deputy chief, or *amir*, of the TTP, while Maulana Fazlullah, head of the Taliban in the Swat region of North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), was elected general secretary (a position that was created to appease him, but has no real function).^a Bahadur separated himself from the TTP in 2008 and allied himself with the like-minded Mullah Nazir, because he was not in favor of

fighting against the Pakistani government, while Baitullah Mehsud wanted to stage major attacks against Pakistani military, government, and civilian targets.¹⁸ In the spring of 2009, however, Bahadur, Nazir, and Baitullah Mehsud formed the Shura Ittihad ul Mujahideen, or Council of United Mujahideen, an alliance of their three groups, and claimed to have resolved their previous issues.¹⁹ But by the fall of 2009, this union began to splinter after 11 of Nazir's men were killed by Uzbek fighters in Salay Rogha in South Waziristan, and the Baitullah faction, a protector of the Uzbeks, refused to hand over the militants and four Mehsuds involved in the killing.²⁰

According to Taliban sources in South Waziristan and the Tank district of NWFP, nearly 40 Taliban groups have joined the TTP, popularly known as the Pakistani Taliban. These groups are represented in a TTP *shura*, or council, based in Miram Shah, the administrative headquarters of North Waziristan. The TTP was created to conduct a coordinated jihad in Afghanistan and to put maximum pressure on U.S. and NATO forces and the Pakistani army; in a bizarre borrowing of NATO's Article 5, the *shura* decided that if the Pakistani army took action against one of the Taliban groups, it would be considered an attack on all. The TTP has spread its network in all seven agencies of the FATA and in the settled districts of the NWFP: Bannu, Karak, Hangu, Kulachi, Dera Ismail Khan (D.I. Khan), Lakki Marwat, Doaba, Kohat, Dir, Buner, and to some extent Mardan, the Swat Valley, and Shangla district.²¹

The Taliban virtually took over South Waziristan, running their own courts in the agency and collecting taxes from the local population. The Taliban militants also fostered the anti-Shiite ideology of al-Qaeda among Mehsuds and Wazirs – who had not previously engaged in sectarian violence. The TTP has carried out several suicide attacks against Shiites, targeting the Muslim minority sect in D.I. Khan, Hangu, Tank, and the Kurram tribal agency. For example, on February 20, 2009, a suicide bomber affiliated with the TTP killed at least 32 Shiites and wounded 100 others attending the funeral of a slain Shiite leader in D.I.

^a The NWFP is being renamed Khyber-Pukhtunkhwa.

Khan.²² Qari Hussain, the notoriously anti-Shiite Mehsud Taliban commander and trainer of suicide bombers, is a staunch supporter of the banned anti-Shiite group Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) in South Waziristan. Another notorious terrorist, Qari Zafar, reputedly a close friend of Qari Hussain, was involved in the suicide attack on the U.S. Consulate in Karachi in 2006 and took refuge in South Waziristan.²³ One U.S. diplomat and three Pakistanis were killed in that attack.²⁴ (Zafar was reportedly killed in a February 2010 drone missile strike in North Waziristan.)

The structure of the insurgencies in South Waziristan

The Taliban in South Waziristan draws its members primarily from three Pashtun tribes in the agency: the Ahmadzai Wazirs, the Mehsuds, and the Bhattanis. The presence of foreign fighters has proved controversial within the militant movements, as has the question of whether to target the Pakistani state in addition to U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan. The late Baitullah Mehsud and his ideological heirs have generally been in favor of attacking Pakistani government and military targets, and have offered shelter to Uzbek militants in the region. Mullah Nazir, on the other hand, focuses his Wana-based Taliban forces on fighting Western troops in Afghanistan, and forcibly expelled Uzbek jihadists in 2007.

Al-Qaeda and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan

At the beginning of 2002, shortly after U.S. and NATO forces overthrew the Taliban government in Afghanistan, thousands of Uzbeks from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), led by Tahir Yuldashev, and hundreds of Arabs affiliated with al-Qaeda went to South Waziristan. The Uzbeks and Arabs first settled in the area of Wana, historically inhabited by the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe. The Uzbeks and Arabs were fluent Pashto speakers who wore the native *shalwar kameez*, making them somewhat difficult to recognize immediately as outsiders. They

bought properties and agricultural lands in the Angoor Adda, Azam Warsak, and Shin Warsak areas around Wana near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, as did smaller groups of Tajiks, Turkmens, and Chechens.²⁵ During the Pakistani military operations of 2004 in Wana, there were reports that Ayman al-Zawahiri, the deputy head of al-Qaeda, was living in or around Wana.²⁶

Due to frequent U.S. drone strikes in 2008 and 2009, many of the Wana-based Arabs affiliated with al-Qaeda shifted to other, Mehsud-controlled areas of South Waziristan, namely Barwand, Makeen, Ladha, Sam, Darga, Sararogha, and Dwa Toi. IMU leader Tahir Yuldashev reportedly died from injuries suffered in a U.S. drone strike in a Mehsud-controlled area of South Waziristan in late August 2009, though recent reports suggest he may have survived.²⁷ Repelled by recent Pakistani military operations in South Waziristan, the majority of Uzbek fighters, about 2,500 men, retreated to the Pir Ghar, a mountainous region near Ladha. The hundreds of Arab militants, meanwhile, relocated to areas inhabited by the Shobi Khel subtribe of the Mehsuds, in and around Makeen, Tiarza, Shaga, Zadrona, and Jhangra, near the border with North Waziristan.

The Mehsud Taliban, which had great expectations from the Uzbek fighters residing in South Waziristan, wanted to use them to counter the Pakistani military's fall 2009 operations. However, the results were very disappointing. The Uzbeks put up poor resistance against the Pakistani army in Spinkai Raghzai, Barwand, Makeen, Ladha, and Sararogha; they were chased out from all the major villages and towns in South Waziristan, and most of them were forced to retreat to North Waziristan. However, the remaining IMU Uzbeks continue to carry out attacks against Pakistani army check posts in the towns of Ladha, Makeen, Kani Guram, and Dwa Toi, and sometimes as far as Sararogha, South Waziristan. They travel by horse over the Pir Ghar mountains between North and South Waziristan, stopping overnight at the villages of Borakai

and Koch Pandai, and returning to Miram Shah and Mir Ali.²⁸

The majority of the al-Qaeda-affiliated Arabs in South Waziristan have also shifted across the border into North Waziristan because of frequent drone strikes in and around the main towns of the South. According to Sailab Mehsud, South Waziristan correspondent for the FATA Research Center, and Ishtiaq Mahsud, a reporter for the Associated Press, more than 32 senior or mid-level al-Qaeda militants were killed in late 2009 and early 2010 in conflict with the Pakistani military and in suspected U.S. drone strikes.²⁹

Quetta Shura Taliban

The relationship between the TTP's leadership in South Waziristan and the Quetta Shura is unclear; the organizations are both very secretive, but the TTP considers Mullah Omar its *amir*. The Quetta Shura Taliban's "code of conduct" released in the summer of 2009 has had little effect on the TTP's operations in South Waziristan, however. Siraj Haqqani and one of his important commanders, Mullah Sangin, have in the past acted as liaisons between the Quetta Shura Taliban and the TTP's local leaders.³⁰

Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan

The chart below provides a brief outline of the structure of the TTP in South Waziristan, and details follow.

Head, or amir	Hakimullah Mehsud ³¹ b
Deputy amir	Maulvi Faqir Muhammad
General secretary	Maulana Fazlullah (also head of Swat Taliban)

b Hakimullah is now believed to be dead and his successor is unclear.

Head in South Waziristan	Wali ur-Rehman Mehsud
Deputy head in South Waziristan	Khan Saeed alias Sajna ³²
Head of suicide bombers and main military planner of TTP in South Waziristan	Qari Hussain
Head of criminal gangs in South Waziristan ³³	Shamim Mehsud (also the head of TTP in Ladha)
Chief spokesman	Rais Khan Mehsud alias Azam Tariq
Head of logistics in South Waziristan	Noor Muhammad
Head of coordination with other FATA-based TTP groups	Sher Azam Aka

Wana Taliban

Head of Wana Taliban	Mullah Nazir
Deputies of Nazir	Malang Wazir and Halim Khan Wazir
Coordination with subtribes of the Ahmadzai Wazir in Wana area	Mettha Khan Wazir

Abdullah Mehsud group

Patron(s) in chief of Abdullah group	Banut Khan Mehsud and Sher Muhammad Mehsud. ³⁴
Head of Abdullah group, in charge of military activities	Misbahuddin Mehsud. ³⁵
Deputy head of Abdullah group	Turkistan Bhattani

Turkistan Bhattani group

Head of Turkistan group	Turkistan Bhattani
Deputy head of Turkistan group	Ikhlas Khan alias Waziristan Baba

War of the Waziristans: The post-Baitullah transition

The first leader of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, Baitullah Mehsud was a charismatic veteran of the Afghan jihad against the Soviets in the 1980s. A Mehsud from the Shobi Khel subtribe who lived in Dwa Toi, he returned from Afghanistan to become something akin to a gym teacher at a boys' primary school in Landi Dhok near Bannu in the NWFP. He developed close ties to the Afghan Taliban in the late 1990s by keeping in touch with mujahideen friends and occasionally visiting the country. When the Taliban government in Afghanistan was overthrown in 2001, Baitullah began organizing a local Taliban movement in South Waziristan. It provided support for thousands of fleeing Afghan Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters, with whom he formed strong links, as well as Uzbek militants traveling to the region.³⁶ Baitullah was reputed to be intelligent, cool-minded, and accessible to his followers, in whom he inspired extreme loyalty. His profile rose when he officially formed the TTP in December 2007, uniting various factions of Pakistani Taliban groups under one umbrella organization. Two of his more notable plots include masterminding the 2007 assassination of Pakistani politician Benazir Bhutto and dispatching a team of Pakistanis to Barcelona to attack the city's public transit.³⁷



He was the frequent target of U.S. drone strikes before he was finally killed on August 5, 2009.

After Baitullah Mehsud's death, his onetime personal driver and spokesman Hakimullah

Baitullah Mehsud, 2004 // A
Majeed/AFP/Getty Images

Mehsud was a top contender for the TTP leadership, along with Qari Hussain, Wali ur-Rehman Mehsud, Noor Saeed, Maulvi Azmatullah Mehsud, and Rais Khan Mehsud alias Azam Tariq. Intervention by Sirajuddin Haqqani, son of the legendary Afghan mujahideen fighter Jalaluddin Haqqani, apparently prevented an armed confrontation between the various factions of would-be Taliban chiefs, telling them they "must follow the path of a great leader ... [and] save your bullets for your true enemies."³⁸ Hakimullah and Wali ur-Rehman also sought to avoid violent conflict, aware that it could splinter the entire movement, not just in South Waziristan but across the FATA and NWFP. Wali ur-Rehman is believed to have had knowledge of the impending Pakistani military operations across the tribal regions and thus wanted to avoid disunity within the TTP.³⁹

The top three candidates for amir, or leader, of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan—Hakimullah Mehsud, Qari Hussain, and Azam Tariq (see profiles below)—belonged to the Bahlolzai branch of the Mehsud tribe, whereas Wali ur-Rehman Mehsud, Maulvi Azmatullah Mehsud, and Noor Saeed came from the Manzai branch, which historically had been at the forefront of power politics in Mehsud territory.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the Mehsud Taliban in South Waziristan reportedly favored the accession of Wali ur-Rehman because he had been a deputy of Baitullah.

After several weeks of reported infighting and deliberations during the late summer of 2009, ⁴¹ the Manzai finally lost to the Bahlolzai in the succession battle, as Hakimullah's support included not only the Bahlolzais, but also Taliban fighters in the tribal agencies of Khyber, Bajaur, Kurram, and Orakzai. During these tense weeks, there were reports that Hakimullah was killed in conflict with Wali ur-Rehman, ⁴² but the militant group's leadership later invited local journalists to South Waziristan and put on a show of unity by sitting side by side.⁴³ After Hakimullah sidelined the rest of the contenders, the 40-member Taliban shura was left with no option but to choose him as head of the TTP. As a consolation, Wali ur-Rehman was made the head

of Mehsud Taliban in South Waziristan, where he commands some 7,000 to 10,000 men.⁴⁴

Hakimullah, Hussain, and Azam Tariq consolidated power over the Mehsud Taliban based in South Waziristan.

According to local sources, Hakimullah, Hussain, and Azam Tariq consolidated power over the Mehsud Taliban based in South Waziristan, and are now fighting against the Pakistani army. Taliban sources in South Waziristan also have said Hakimullah shifted his family to Miram Shah, in North Waziristan, where they are supported by Hafiz Gul Bahadur, the current head of the Taliban in North Waziristan. Wali ur-Rehman is reported to be living there with his family as well.⁴⁵

Significant militant commanders in South Waziristan

Mehsuds

Hakimullah Mehsud^c



Hakimullah Mehsud, 2008, center // Daud Khan Khattak

^c Hakimullah is now believed to be dead and his successor is unclear.

The most recent chief of the TTP, Hakimullah Mehsud, was around 30 and of the Woji Khel clan of the Ishangi branch of the Mehsud tribe. He was the son of Abdullah Din Mehsud, and had at least four brothers—two of whom, Ijaz and Kalimullah, died while fighting Pakistani forces in South Waziristan in 2008—and four sisters.⁴⁶ Hakimullah was originally from the Kotkai area, in the Spinkai Raghzai region in South Waziristan. The TTP leader had two wives, one from his natal Ishangi tribe and one from the Afridi tribe in Orakzai.

Hakimullah received his early education from age 5 at the madrassa of Dar-ul Aloom Sharia in the Sarwakai Tehsil (or administrative subdivision) of South Waziristan. He also passed his middle school exams in Kotkai. However, he left his religious education incomplete as he joined the local Taliban organization in South Waziristan in the fall of 2003, then went to fight U.S. forces in Afghanistan, where he spent approximately four months. Hakimullah's first combat experience was under the leadership of Baitullah Mehsud in Afghanistan; the two were extremely close, and Hakimullah served as Baitullah's official spokesman for a time in 2006. Along with Maulana Sangeen, a Taliban commander in Afghanistan's Paktika province with links with Sirajuddin Haqqani's militant network, he was part of a force that attacked the Masha Kund military check post in Khost province in 2004. During his time in Afghanistan, Hakimullah also spent many weeks fighting coalition forces in the southern province of Helmand in the district of Sangeen, on the border with Kandahar. He is believed to have been involved in recent cross-border attacks into Afghanistan, and has targeted NATO convoys and hundreds of trucks taking supplies there. In a December 2008 attack orchestrated by Hakimullah, dozens of Humvees were burned near Peshawar, the capital of the North-West Frontier Province.⁴⁷

After his return from Afghanistan in early 2004, Hakimullah turned his attention to the Pakistani forces in the Kalosha area of Wana, where the army had recently launched an operation against Nek Muhammad, then head

of the Taliban in South Waziristan. Hakimullah also fought against Pakistani forces in 2006 and again in 2008, when the army launched operations against the local Taliban movements. Hakimullah was by then a commander, leading between 100 and 150 Mehsud Taliban fighters. Both times the Pakistani army was forced to sign peace treaties with the Taliban militants. Hakimullah also provided shelter and bases for members of al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban in South Waziristan, and is said to be still doing so.⁴⁸

Hakimullah was 23 when he joined the South Waziristan Taliban; within a year and a half the group was fully organized in the agency.⁴⁹ The TTP shura first made him head of the Mehsud Taliban in the Kurram agency, then added Orakzai and Khyber agencies to his portfolio. Hakimullah, a very active leader and the only one to be in charge of three agencies at once, strengthened the TTP in these areas while they were under his control. The militant chief also headed up the Mehsud Taliban in Mohmand and Bajaur agencies for a short time, but had to focus on building the Taliban in Kurram, Orakzai, and Khyber.

Hakimullah, who hated Shiites and considered them heretics, also had close links with the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, a pro-Taliban, anti-Shiite militant organization. As the head of the Taliban in Kurram, he fought against the Shiites and took part in sectarian clashes in Hangu district in early 2007.⁵⁰

Temperamentally, Hakimullah was a hothead—he angered very easily, did not tolerate opposition, and was reputed to be arrogant and prone to emotional outbursts. He was rumored to have shot several men, including some in the Taliban, who disagreed with his orders.⁵¹ He was also more media-friendly than his predecessor Baitullah, and appeared in several videos and audiotapes released to the public, including a video with the Jordanian suicide bomber who attacked a CIA base in Khost, Afghanistan, on December 30, 2009.⁵²

Hakimullah’s ascension to the TTP’s leadership came at a time when the umbrella group had lost support from local tribes across South Waziristan and the rest of the FATA, having been weakened by Pakistani military operations. This makes it unlikely that the TTP will be able to open more fronts against the Pakistani government in the near future. The organization may also be reluctant to attack local Mehsud Taliban opponents, for fear of starting “blood feuds” among area tribes.

The Khost attack may have been a turning point, however. Hakimullah asserted responsibility for the suicide bombing, in which seven CIA officers and a Jordanian intelligence agent were killed and others were injured.⁵³ The TTP released a video of Hakimullah and the bomber, Humam al-Balawi, sitting side-by-side, and al-Balawi claimed the strike was to avenge the death of Baitullah Mehsud in an August 2009 drone attack; some of these drones are reportedly controlled by CIA teams in Khost.⁵⁴ In the following weeks, an unprecedented number of drone-fired missiles slammed into various locations in North Waziristan, one of which reportedly injured Hakimullah. U.S. and other officials say they are almost certain he succumbed to his wounds, but the TTP continues to issue denials.⁵⁵ Hakimullah put out audiotapes on January 16 and 17 in a bid to quell rumors of his death, but has not been heard from since.⁵⁶ Despite the Taliban’s denials, he is generally believed to have died since then.

Wali ur-Rehman Mehsud

Wali ur-Rehman, around 40 years old and the son of Asmatullah, is from a middle-class family in the Mal Khel branch of the Mehsud tribe in South Waziristan. His family lives in Miram Shah, but he moves around Waziristan quite a bit; he is currently believed to reside in the Momi Karam area, and studied in the Jamia Islamia Imdadia madrassa in Faisalabad.⁵⁷ After graduating in 1996, he returned to South Waziristan to teach in a madrassa in Kani Guram. Before joining the Taliban movement in 2004, Wali ur-Rehman was affiliated with the Islamist political party



Wali ur-Rehman, right // A Majeed/AFP/Getty Images

Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F), with which he still maintains contacts.⁵⁸

Wali ur-Rehman is reputed to be humble, cool-minded, intelligent, and polite. Despite earlier disagreements over the TTP's line of succession, he is now believed to be a close ally of the fiery Hakimullah and currently serves as chief of the TTP in South Waziristan, as well as the organization's primary military strategist. In 2007 he was given responsibility for looking after the movement's financial matters. Wali ur-Rehman has also participated in cross-border attacks in Afghanistan against U.S. and NATO forces, and against Pakistani security forces in 2005 and 2008. His brother, Qareeb-ur-Rehman, was killed by Pakistani forces when the militants attacked the Splitoi fort in South Waziristan in July 2008.⁵⁹

Wali ur-Rehman is reportedly in secret negotiations with elements of the Pakistani government.

Sailab Mehsud, a South Waziristan correspondent for the FATA Research Center, assesses that tension between Hakimullah and Wali ur-Rehman was on the rise because Wali ur-Rehman wants to end the TTP's war with the Pakistani government, saying it has destroyed the Mehsud tribe. Wali ur-Rehman is reportedly in secret negotiations

with elements of the Pakistani government in Peshawar or Khyber, but Hakimullah and Qari Hussain wanted to carry on fighting the Pakistani military.⁶⁰

Qari Hussain

Another of the top contenders for the TTP leadership after the death of Baitullah Mehsud, Qari Hussain, is around 36 years old and from the Ishangi subtribe of the Bahlolzai tribe in South Waziristan. He was originally based in the Spinkai Raghzai area of South Waziristan, and was a close aide of Baitullah Mehsud. Hussain graduated from the Jamia Binoria madrassa in Karachi in 1994 and became a member of the anti-Shiite militant group, Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), before joining the Taliban movement in 2004.⁶¹ Hussain's reputation—ruthless, anti-Shiite, and a powerful orator—lent itself to his spearheading a brutal campaign of suicide attacks across Pakistan, beginning around 2006. He trained hundreds of suicide bombers, some as young as 11 years old, to target Pakistani military and government installations as well as markets, funerals, hospitals, and other “soft” targets.⁶² In 2008 alone, 965 people were reported killed in 66 suicide bombings across Pakistan, including police and army officials along with many innocent civilians.⁶³ In 2009, more than 1,200 people were killed and another 2,300 were injured in at least 80 suicide bombings across the country.⁶⁴

Pakistani intelligence officials say that 70 percent of suicide bombers in Pakistan were trained at camps run by Qari Hussain, and the Pakistani government has a reward of 50 million Pakistani rupees (about \$600,000) for information leading to his capture or death.⁶⁵ His influence is not limited to Pakistan: A 2007 U.N. report found that 80 percent of suicide attackers in Afghanistan came from camps in Pakistan.⁶⁶

Hussain's virulent anti-Shiism is worth emphasizing: He reportedly used to abduct Shiites from Tank and Dera Ismail Khan and take them to his base in Spinkai Raghzai, where he would tie them up with barn animals, torturing

and beheading some of the captives.⁶⁷ Hussain has also worked to strengthen the presence of the anti-Shiite SSP in South Waziristan, involving Mehsud and Wazir tribesmen in sectarian clashes in the frontier regions.

Once the head of the Pakistani Taliban in Kotkai, South Waziristan, Hussain has threatened to deploy even more suicide bombers against the Pakistani government, citing the recent military operations as provocation. One of Hussain's brothers carried out a suicide attack in Peshawar in November 2009, the first close relative of a local Taliban commander to carry out such an attack.⁶⁸ Hussain is now believed to be in Mir Ali, North Waziristan, having fled the Pakistani military operations in South Waziristan in the fall of 2009, and there he has strong support from the Daur tribe, a small group in and around central South Waziristan, mainly Miram Shah, Mir Ali, Datta Khel, and Dos Ali.

Qari Hussain has refused to become head of the TTP since the reported death of Hakimullah Mehsud because he wants to keep a low profile.

According to local tribal and Taliban sources in South Waziristan, Qari Hussain has refused to become head of the TTP since the reported death of Hakimullah Mehsud because he wants to keep a low profile, presumably to avoid being killed himself. Thus he stays in Mir Ali most of the time.⁶⁹

Azam Tariq

The current spokesman of the TTP in South Waziristan, 40-year-old Azam Tariq belongs to the Kie Khel subtribe of the Mehsuds and hails from the Delay area of South Waziristan. His real name is Rais Khan Mehsud, though the onetime schoolteacher in Tank city is well known by his



Pakistan's Most Wanted, November 2009; Qari Hussain #3, Azam Tariq, #4 // AFP/Getty.

alias, "Teacher." In 2008 and 2009, Tariq was the TTP chief in Tank city, in the NWFP near the border of South Waziristan, an area populated overwhelmingly by the Mehsud tribe. He is also affiliated with Sipah-e-Sahaba.

Pakistan (SSP). Because he is known as an intelligent man with expertise in local Mehsud traditions and politics, locals used to bring their disputes to him for settlement rather than engage the Pakistani judicial system. Tariq was appointed TTP spokesman in September 2009 after the arrest of Maulvi Omar of Bajaur in mid-August.⁷⁰ He is reputedly very close to Hakimullah and Qari Hussain.⁷¹

Noor Saeed

Noor Saeed, a 30-year-old from the Shobi Khel clan of the Mehsuds, is a member of the TTP shura and very popular among the Mehsud Taliban, having been Baitullah Mehsud's deputy and part-time spokesman. He was a farmer before joining the Mehsud Taliban movement in South Waziristan in 2004. Noor Saeed is reportedly very religious and humble in his dealings with others.⁷²

Shamim Mehsud

At the head of the TTP's network of criminals is Shamim, a 35-year-old from the Shaman Khel tribe of the Mehsuds from Tangi in Ladha, South Waziristan. Shamim, from a

very poor family in Ladha, worked as a waiter in Spinkai Raghzai before he was made head of the TTP of Ladha in 2007. He now serves as chief of a Taliban commando group of about 30 men--professional criminals--who collect millions of rupees every year through robberies, kidnapping for ransom, and bank lootings to fund the insurgency. The group has informants in all of Pakistan's major cities who provide intelligence about where to strike and the likely value of the targets.⁷³

Smaller Mehsud militant groups in South Waziristan

Abdullah Mehsud group (pro-government)

Abdullah Mehsud, the leader of a splinter group of militants first based in Nano village in South Waziristan and Miram Shah in North Waziristan, spent about two years at the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay, and after his release in March 2004 began organizing the local Mehsud Taliban in South Waziristan to fight U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan.⁷⁴ In October 2004 he was involved in the kidnapping of two Chinese engineers, one of whom was killed during a rescue mission by Pakistani security forces. Abdullah died in Zhob, Baluchistan—by blowing himself up with a hand grenade, Pakistani officials say—during a confrontation with military forces in July 2007.⁷⁵

After Abdullah's death, his followers coalesced around Saif Rehman Mehsud and later Abdullah's cousin, Qari Zainuddin Mehsud, also known as Qari Zain. Zainuddin developed serious differences with Baitullah Mehsud over whether to target Pakistan's security apparatus or focus on Western forces in Afghanistan—the TTP was in favor of targeting Pakistan—and was forced out of South Waziristan after open hostilities began in 2008.⁷⁶ Zainuddin was killed in June 2009 by one of his own bodyguards.⁷⁷ Zainuddin's younger brother, Misbahuddin Mehsud, now leads the group, and is considered relatively pro-government for two reasons: First, the Abdullah group has split from the TTP

over whether to fight the Pakistani army in the FATA and NWFP; second, Misbahuddin's forces are no match for the TTP, so he needs government protection.

The Abdullah Mehsud group, which has about 2,000 fighters, is now based in Tank and D.I. Khan in NWFP, and has the support of the Pakistani government. Its fighters are allied with Turkistan Bhattani, another anti-TTP commander, causing concern for the TTP. The Abdullah group and its allies have forced the majority of TTP-affiliated militants from Tank and D.I. Khan back into South Waziristan. Many on both sides have been killed.⁷⁸

Sheryar Mehsud group (anti-government)

Sheryar Mehsud, a 35-year-old of the Shobi Khel branch of the Mehsud tribe from the village of Jhangra in South Waziristan, was not on good terms with the late Baitullah Mehsud. Sheryar believed that his family, which is well-off and respected in his region, put him in a stronger position to run the Mehsud Taliban in South Waziristan. Sheryar commands a small group of about 150 men, who conduct cross-border attacks into Afghanistan and some criminal activities, like car-snatching and kidnapping for ransom in cities such as Tank and D.I. Khan. His enmity with Baitullah continued with Hakimullah, and Sheryar is considered anti-government because of his focus on targeting Pakistani police and government.⁷⁹

Wazirs

Mullah Nazir, Wana Taliban (pro-government)

Mullah Nazir is a prominent Taliban commander from the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe of Wana, the administrative headquarters of South Waziristan. He had madrassa training, has dual citizenship in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and was a close aide to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the chief of Hizb-i Islami Afghanistan. He became the head of the Wana Taliban in late 2006 after challenging Haji Sharif and Haji Omar and their allies over the presence of



Mullah Nazir, center // STRDEL/AFP/Getty Images

thousands of militants from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan then living in South Waziristan. Nazir accused the Uzbeks of complicity in the assassination of dozens of Ahmadzai Wazir tribal elders in Wana. After 10 days of fighting in April 2007, Mullah Nazir's forces--supported by the local Ahmadzai Wazir tribe and its militiamen, as well as the Pakistani government--succeeded in expelling about 2,000 Uzbeks from Wana.⁸⁰ Baitullah Mehsud then offered the fleeing Uzbeks shelter in the Mehsud-controlled areas of South Waziristan, namely Darga, Sararogha, and Barwand, angering Nazir.⁸¹ Baitullah was apparently ordered by Sirajuddin Haqqani, a leader of the Haqqani network, to give the Uzbeks temporary refuge because they had nowhere else to go.⁸²

Mullah Nazir currently controls at least 14 Taliban groups in Wana, comprising about 4,000 fighters, and is involved in cross-border attacks on U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan.⁸³ He has been targeted at least twice by U.S. drones and suffered a leg wound in one attack.⁸⁴ He is considered "pro-government" Taliban because he primarily

targets Western troops fighting in Afghanistan, although he maintains close ties with the Arab al-Qaeda movement.⁸⁵

As discussed earlier, Mullah Nazir has been at loggerheads with the TTP leadership over a September 2009 incident in which Mullah Nazir alleges that 11 of his men were killed in Mehsud territory in Salay Rogha, South Waziristan, as they were returning to Wana. The TTP so far has refused to hand over the four Mehsuds and four Uzbeks implicated in the attack, straining relations between the Mehsuds and the Ahmadzai Wazirs. The Shura Ittihad ul Mujahideen--formed by Baitullah Mehsud, Mullah Nazir, and Hafiz Gul Bahadur of North Waziristan in early 2009--has broken down.⁸⁶ Nazir is now considered the commander of all the Wana Taliban.

Mullah Nazir currently controls at least 14 Taliban groups in Wana, comprising about 4,000 fighters.

Anti-Mullah Nazir Waziri groups

Haji Sharif group (anti-government)

An Ahmadzai Wazir from Wana, Haji Sharif is around 50 years old and commands about 500 men. He has fought against government forces in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, and supported the Uzbek militants when they were being expelled from Wana by Mullah Nazir's fighters. After the Uzbeks were expelled, Haji Sharif shifted to Miram Shah, in North Waziristan, and allied himself with the late Baitullah Mehsud. However, Haji Sharif reconciled with Mullah Nazir in September 2007 after developing differences with members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan over whether to target locals in Wana and the Pakistani government. After this reconciliation, Haji Sharif mostly stopped targeting local tribal elders and government officials in South Waziristan. He then returned to Wana, where he now resides.⁸⁷

Haji Omar group (anti-government)

Haji Omar, an approximately 58-year-old veteran of the anti-Soviet jihad in the 1980s and a member of the Yargul Khel subtribe of the Ahmadzai Wazirs,⁸⁸ was head of the Wana Taliban in 2004 when the Pakistani military launched operations there to flush out foreign militants and their local supporters after the death of Nek Muhammad. Reputed to have close ties to al-Qaeda fighters in the region, he was involved in the killing of tribal elders in Wana and was a strong supporter of Uzbek militants in Waziristan. He fought on behalf of the Uzbeks against Mullah Nazir and, like his brother Haji Sharif, was later forced to take refuge in Miram Shah in North Waziristan, where he allied himself with Baitullah Mehsud. Haji Omar was reportedly killed by a U.S. drone strike in North Waziristan in December 2009,⁸⁹ though earlier reports indicated he was killed in October 2008.⁹⁰ His group of several hundred men is now said to be relatively ineffective.

Abbas group (anti-government)

Maulvi Abbas Wazir is a cousin of Haji Sharif and Haji Omar, against whom he fought in April 2007 while they were allied against arch-rival Mullah Nazir and the Ahmadzai Wazir militiamen in the dispute over the Uzbeks. He is about 42 years old and from the Ahmadzai branch of the Wazir tribe. He is also involved in cross-border attacks on U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan and is said to have some 150 to 200 fighters under his command.⁹¹

Noor Islam group (anti-government)

Noor Islam, another member of the Ahmadzai Wazirs, veteran of the anti-Soviet jihad, and a brother of Haji Sharif and Haji Omar, fought on behalf of the Uzbeks in April 2007 and was subsequently forced to leave Wana, after which he took refuge with Baitullah Mehsud. He is the sworn enemy of Mullah Nazir, and his associates killed Nazir's deputy, Malik Khanan, in May 2008 in South

Waziristan. Noor Islam is reported to have about 250 to 300 fighters under his command, and directs them in cross-border attacks against U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan; he also mounted attacks on the Pakistani army in 2004.⁹²

Bhittani groups in South Waziristan

Turkistan Bhittani group (pro-government)

The first of the three prominent Bhittani commanders operating in South Waziristan is Malik Turkistan Bhittani, a retired corporal of the Frontier Corps. He is from the Naimat Khel subtribe of the Bhittani tribe from the Sro Ghar area of Jandola, in South Waziristan, where he is the head of a peace committee whose goal is to keep the TTP away from Jandola and Tank. Turkistan Bhittani is considered pro-government, and has allied himself with the Abdullah Mehsud group against the TTP. The Turkistan group has been attacked several times by TTP militants, including in 2008 when members of the TTP overran Jandola and killed about 30 peace committee members. In September 2009, TTP fighters and other Bhittani militants attacked Turkistan's forces in Tank, Jandola, and Sro Ghar, killing dozens. Turkistan himself survived and is now keeping a low profile in Tank and Dera Ismail Khan to avoid TTP threats.⁹³ The Bhittani tribe, though numerically smaller than the Mehsuds and the Wazirs, lives along the strategically important road from the settled district of Tank into South Waziristan, and thus has outside political sway. Turkistan Bhittani is also a deputy of the Abdullah Mehsud group, because on his own he is no match for the TTP.

Asmatullah Shaheen group (anti-government)

The second prominent Bhittani commander active in the Jandola area of South Waziristan is Asmatullah Shaheen, from the Khichi subtribe of the Bhittanis and Khichi village. Asmatullah was initially affiliated with the Islamic militant group Harkat-ul-Mujahideen of Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman, but later joined the TTP under Baitullah Mehsud. He is

involved in kidnapping for ransom, vehicle hijacking, and cross-border attacks on U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan. Asmatullah is currently in conflict with Turkistan Bhattani, who expelled him from Jandola in July 2009 to the Mehsud areas of South Waziristan. Asmatullah controls between 200 and 250 men.⁹⁴

Awal Khan Bhattani group (anti-government)

Awal Khan Bhattani is the third important Taliban commander active in the Jandola area of South Waziristan. He is also involved in cross-border attacks into Afghanistan. Like Asmatullah Shaheen, Awal Khan is not on good terms with Turkistan Bhattani, though he maintains a decent relationship with the TTP around Jandola.⁹⁵

Punjabi Taliban group of Wana (pro-government)

Lastly, the Punjabi Taliban, a relatively new phenomenon, used to operate out of Wana. It is affiliated with a variety of banned sectarian and militant groups such as Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Jamiat ul-Ansar, Jamiat ul-Furqan, and Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan. Led by the Punjabi Abdur Rehman,⁹⁶ the Punjabi Taliban is allied with Mullah Nazir against the Uzbeks and is believed to number around 3,000 men. Members generally live among the Ahmadzai Wazirs, as well as in the Mehsud-inhabited areas of Sararogha, Makeen, and Ladha, and in Angoor Adda and Azam Warsak. They focus their attacks on American and NATO forces in Afghanistan.

However, most members of the Punjabi Taliban have shifted from South to North Waziristan because it was difficult for them to blend in among the locals due to their complexions, and because as newcomers they were not well-connected in the area. According to Safder Daur, a journalist in North Waziristan, these fighters are more inclined to fit in with North Waziristan because some of them were based there during the anti-Soviet jihad during the 1980s and have close links with the local Uthmanzai and Daur tribes.⁹⁷

A short history of Pakistani Army operations and peace deals in South Waziristan, 2004-08

There have been four major Pakistani-led military operations against factions of the Taliban in South Waziristan since 2004, the most recent of which—Operation Path to Salvation, or Rah-e-Nijat—is ongoing. The first major campaign, during the spring and summer of 2004, pitted the young and charismatic Taliban commander Nek Muhammad Wazir and thousands of his supporters—including militant leaders Noor Islam and Haji Sharif—against as many as 7,000 Pakistani soldiers in the area west of Wana. By the end of the nearly two-week-long operation, 16 Pakistani soldiers had been killed in fierce fighting.⁹⁸ Several months later, some 10,000 Pakistani army troops attacked an area north of Wana, going up against more than 200 Chechens and Uzbeks, a few Arabs, and several hundred local militants. As its casualties increased, however, the Pakistani government pursued a series of “peace deals” with the local militants.

The first of these deals, called the Shakai agreement, was signed in a madrassa in Shakai in spring 2004 by Nek Muhammad, some of his allies, and the commander of the Pakistani forces battling the militants in South Waziristan, Lt. Gen. Safdar Hussain.⁹⁹ The Army agreed to remove troops from Nek Muhammad’s territory and compensate the militants for losses, while Nek Muhammad promised to lay down arms and “register” foreign militants living in the area.¹⁰⁰ The peace deal was short-lived; Nek Muhammad soon violated the terms of the pact and in June 2004 was killed by a U.S. drone strike near Wana.¹⁰¹

The second military operation was carried out in early 2005, in the Mehsud-controlled areas of South Waziristan, against 4,000 fighters led by Baitullah Mehsud and Abdullah Mehsud. As in the previous campaign, the Pakistani military suffered casualties and eventually negotiated a settlement with the militants. It was signed in early February in Sararogha by Baitullah, three tribal elders,

and a representative of the Pakistani government; Sirajuddin Haqqani is reported to have played a role in the negotiations.¹⁰² Baitullah promised he would stop sheltering foreign militants, attacking security forces in the area, and targeting government installations, while the army again agreed to remove troops and compensate for losses.¹⁰³ This peace arrangement also did not last long; Baitullah soon oversaw a suicide bombing campaign targeting the Pakistani government, which lasted until his death in August 2009.¹⁰⁴ The peace deal, however, emboldened the Mehsud Taliban, which began to virtually rule South Waziristan as thousands of local fighters joined the movement and the writ of the Pakistani government faded away.

The third major operation in South Waziristan was launched in January 2008 with the aim of clearing the area of Baitullah Mehsud's supporters and capturing or killing key leaders of the Taliban faction, including Baitullah and the suicide bomb campaign chief, Qari Hussain.¹⁰⁵ About 200,000 residents of South Waziristan were displaced during this conflict.¹⁰⁶ After around six weeks of harsh fighting, talks began toward a peace agreement with conditions similar to those of previous arrangements,¹⁰⁷ and the Pakistani army started to withdraw in May. A Pakistani military commander commented, "We are not moving out, and are only re-adjusting our positions."¹⁰⁸ Underscoring the freedom of movement given to Baitullah Mehsud in the spring 2008 peace agreement was his famed press conference in June, for which he invited local journalists to his base in South Waziristan.¹⁰⁹ Sirajuddin Haqqani was again rumored to play a role in negotiations between the Pakistani military and the Mehsud Taliban, reportedly traveling in an 11-vehicle convoy to mediate the fighting.¹¹⁰ The peace agreement broke down shortly, however, as the suicide bombing campaign continued, Qari Hussain rebuilt a suicide training camp in Spinkai Raghzai, and Baitullah's network continued to target Pakistani forces.¹¹¹ The Taliban's strength was demonstrated in two ambushes of military targets in South Waziristan in August of 2007 and January of 2008; in the first ambush, more

than 100 Pakistani troops were taken hostage, and in the second, hundreds of Mehsud fighters captured a key fort at Sararogha.¹¹²

Some have argued that negotiating directly with militants rather than tribal leaders legitimized the extremist movement at the expense of the tribes.¹¹³ Pakistani analyst Shuja Nawaz has also pointed out that the military campaigns relied heavily on Pakistan's Frontier Corps, which was not up to the job of "aggressively patrolling or fighting the well-armed and well-trained militants," suggesting a change in tactics was needed.¹¹⁴

Operation Rah-e-Nijat ("Path to Salvation"), October 2009-present

After months of buildup,¹¹⁵ around 30,000 Pakistani soldiers pushed into South Waziristan on October 17, 2009, to face off against thousands of Taliban militants.¹¹⁶ Over the next several weeks, both sides claimed an early lead, though information coming out of the war zone was nearly impossible to verify because the military prohibited journalists and aid workers from entering the region. Hundreds of thousands of residents fled the area ahead of the operations.¹¹⁷ During the first two weeks of the fighting, the Taliban put up stiff resistance, but many of the fighters melted away into other tribal areas such as Orakzai and North Waziristan. They also have used guerrilla tactics like raiding Pakistani army check posts at night and planting improvised bombs along roads in South Waziristan.¹¹⁸

The Pakistani forces appear to have the militant movement on the run with this campaign. In early November 2009, about three weeks into the offensive, Hakimullah Mehsud warned his followers that cowards "will go to hell ... a very bad place," signaling that all was not well within the TTP ranks.¹¹⁹ The Abdullah Mehsud group and fighters led by Turkistan Bhattani—both anti-TTP factions—also set out to South Waziristan to fight alongside the Pakistani military. This was a key benefit for the government, as the tribesmen are familiar with the area and its challenging terrain. The

two groups have also attempted to keep the peace in Tank and D.I. Khan as the TTP fighters retreated deeper into the mountains of Waziristan.¹²⁰ Additionally, the many thousands of refugees fleeing South Waziristan have largely turned against the TTP, blaming it for the ongoing fighting.¹²¹

The idea of anti-TTP tribal militias, or lashkars, being formed by Mehsud tribesmen in South Waziristan is gaining traction. The move is supported by the Pakistani government, which has reportedly pressured Mehsud tribal elders to form such militias, assuring them of security and financial support if they do, while threatening a cessation of current benefits if they resist.¹²² Humayun Khan, the son of Shahzada Waziristan Fazal Din Mehsud, the famed anti-British fighter in South Waziristan, is one possible chief for the South Waziristan lashkar. However, he does not have the full support of the community, as leaders are reluctant to trust the Pakistani government's promises. If the government cuts another peace deal with the tribes—as seems likely¹²³—and the militants return to their South Waziristan strongholds, the lashkar fighters could face severe retribution from the Taliban.¹²⁴

As Operation Rah-e-Nijat has forced the TTP to take refuge in North Waziristan, the fighters have established 13 bases across the agency in Spalga, Miram Shah, Mir Ali, Deegan, and Datta Khel. Mehsud Taliban militants regularly move from these bases to carry out sporadic attacks against Pakistani army camps and check posts in South Waziristan and across the FATA. The TTP leadership—Hakimullah (if he survived the drone strike), Wali ur-Rehman, Qari Hussain, and Azam Tariq—are presently believed to be living with their families under the protection of Hafiz Gul Bahadur in North Waziristan.¹²⁵

According to Siraj Mehsud, deputy to Shamin Mehsud, the Taliban chief in Ladha, South Waziristan, Wazir and Daur tribesmen are coming in groups of 30 to 50 to carry out guerrilla attacks against the Pakistani army, staying for 10 days or so before returning to North Waziristan, at which

point fresh groups of fighters are sent into South Waziristan to carry on the cycle.¹²⁶

U.S. operations in South Waziristan: Drone strikes

The U.S. program of sending Predator drone aircraft to fire missiles at targets in northwest Pakistan has escalated dramatically, beginning in the summer of 2008. In 2008, there were 34 drone strikes, while in 2009 there were 53, killing high-ranking figures in al-Qaeda, Uzbek militant groups, and the TTP—most famously, Baitullah Mehsud on August 5, 2009.¹²⁷ As a result of these strikes, the Taliban's leadership and foot soldiers have taken measures to increase their operational security. They avoid gathering in open places and traveling by vehicle during the day. Phones are used infrequently, with messages delivered instead via trusted agents. Taliban leaders have also become more secretive in their movements, even with their subordinates, although they move around quite often to avoid attacks.¹²⁸

A quick overview of major Pashtun tribes in South Waziristan

Like the other tribal agencies in the FATA, South Waziristan is home to a diverse collection of Pashtun tribes, the most prominent of which are the Mehsuds, Ahmadzai Wazirs, Bhattanis, Urmur-Burkis, Suleiman Khel, and Dottanis. The Mehsuds are the largest in population and historical significance, followed by the Ahmadzai Wazirs and the Bhattanis. Tribal elders play an important dominant role in FATA society, although this role has been significantly weakened since the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the growing importance of the clergy associated with the rise of Islamism in the FATA. In recent years, Taliban commanders have even begun to act as tribal elders within their respective tribes and clans. However, original tribal leaders still maintain some influence over their followers and their traditional role has not been completely eradicated.

The chart below lists major administrative units, or tehsils, in South Waziristan and the subtribes that inhabit them.

Ladha Tehsil	Shaman Khel, Langer Khel, Garri, Ishangi, Mal Khel, Shamiri, Sayyeds, Shobi Khel, Urmur-Burki tribe, Baba Khel, Bodenzai, Slamoni, Galishai, Malikdinai
Makeen Tehsil	Abdulai, Imar Khel, Malikshi, Ishangi, Shobi Khel, Band Khel, Nazar Khel
Sararogha Tehsil	Shaman Khel, Galishai, Shamiri, Langer Khel, Habiati Khel, Jalal Khel, Shobi Khel, Gory Khel, Abdulai, Ishangi, Malikshai, Faridi, Kikari, Paray Khel, Kie Khel
Tiarza Tehsil	Machi Khel, Nikzan Khel, Abdur Rehman Khel, Paray Khel, Langer Khel, Baand Khel
Shawal Tehsil	Jalal Khel, Shobi Khel, Habiati Khel, Abdulai
Sarwakai Tehsil	Jalal Khel, Machi Khel, Abdur Rehman Khel, Nikzan Khel, Faridi, Kikari
Wana (Ahmadzai Wazirs)	Zali Khel, Yargul Khel, Kaka Khel, Khoni Khel, Khojal Khel, Sarki Khel, Ganji Khel, Toji Khel, Moghal Khel

Mehsud tribe

The Mehsud tribe mainly inhabits the central region of South Waziristan, concentrated in villages such as Makeen, Ladha, Sararogha, Spinkai Raghzai, and Kotkai. The three main subtribes of the Mehsuds are the Dre Masid, a branch of which is the Alizai, which splits into the Shobi Khel and Manzai; the Bahlolzai, which contains the Ishangi clan; and Shaman Khel. The Manzai are the largest in number, followed by the Bahlolzai and Shaman Khel. There are an estimated 650,000 to 700,000 Mehsuds in South Waziristan.

Much if not all of the TTP's current leadership is drawn from the Mehsud tribe: Baitullah Mehsud was from the

Shobi Khel subtribe, while Hakimullah Mehsud and Qari Hussain come from the Ishangi clan of the Bahlolzai subtribe. Other subtribes active in the TTP are the Abdulai, Kie Khel, Langer Khel, and Haibat Khel.

Ahmadzai Wazir tribe of Wana

The Ahmadzai Wazirs are the cousins of Mehsuds and inhabit the western and southern parts of South Waziristan. Although they are smaller in number—around 150,000 to 200,000—than the Mehsuds, they control Wana, the administrative headquarters of South Waziristan. There are nine subtribes of Ahmadzai Wazirs, the largest of which is the Zali Khel. Most of the Pakistani Taliban leadership from 2003 to 2007 was derived from Yargul Khel, the largest clan of the Zali Khel.¹²⁹ Mullah Nazir, the supreme commander of the Ahmadzai Wazir Taliban, belongs to Kaka Khel, the smallest clan of the Zali Khel subtribe.¹³⁰ Malik Hanan and Malang are the most significant elders of Ahmadzai Wazir tribe.

Bhittani tribe of Jandola

The Bhittani tribe is the third-largest tribe in South Waziristan, and its members mainly live in the western areas of the agency, along and over the border near Tank and D.I. Khan. Though relatively small, with about 70,000 to 80,000 people, the tribe controls the main gateway into South Waziristan from the settled districts and provides passage to Mehsuds and Ahmadzai Wazirs. Asmatullah Shaheen, Turkistan Bhittani, and Sher Rehman are the elders of the Bhittani tribe.

Urmur-Burki tribe of Kani Guram

The Urmur-Burki is a small tribe of about 7,000 to 10,000 people who live in Kani Guram, a historic town that lies at the bottom of the Ladha subdivision, encircled by the much larger Mehsud tribe. Members of the Urmur-Burki tribe speak their own language, Ormuri.

Dottani tribe

The Dottani tribe numbers about 10,000 people who live near the southern border of South Waziristan, across from the Zhob district of Baluchistan.

Grievances of the local population: the rise and fall of the Taliban

Before 2003, tribesmen across South Waziristan were increasingly frustrated with the inefficient and allegedly corrupt local political administration. Job opportunities were scarce, as were functioning roads, schools, and hospitals. The local political agents and tribal leaders reportedly used schoolhouses and hospitals in Makeen, Ladha, Sararogha, Sarwakai, and Dwa Toi as personal guesthouses for their friends. Tribal elders and their family members received the salaries of the teachers or hospital staff as gifts or bribes. Teachers were paid without performing their duties, hospitals went unstaffed, and doctors and administrators reputedly drove ambulances for personal use.¹³¹ Corruption and bribery were seen as commonplace.

In this atmosphere of frustration, the Taliban swept fully into South Waziristan in 2003. Local tribesmen believed that the Taliban would force doctors and teachers to provide services and would eliminate—or at least reduce—corruption in agency’s political system.¹³² For the first year or so, the Taliban put pressure on professionals to improve services. It also dispensed rapid justice, killing or expelling criminals and deterring others, who knew that if caught they would face severe punishment, often death.¹³³ In addition, the Taliban implemented a system of taxing the population to fund the fight against U.S. and NATO forces, and Pakistan’s military, in the region. The people of South Waziristan, as orthodox Sunni Muslims, were apparently receptive to the militants’ simple message of jihad against Western forces.

However, the Pakistani Taliban factions in South Waziristan made what appears to be a critical strategic error: They attacked tribal structures within the agency, which had held up the pillars of tribal society for generations. About 200 of the *maliks*, or leaders, of the Mehsud and Ahmadzai Wazir tribes, who had acted as bridges between the Pakistani government and the tribes, were either killed, forced to leave the area, or made to keep silent.¹³⁴ Taliban leaders apparently feared that in the event of conflict between the militants and the Pakistani government, tribal elders could form anti-Taliban lashkars and turn the local populations against the militants. Thus, while the Taliban consolidated power in the first half of the 2000s, it was in fact contributing to its own unpopularity.

As the Taliban’s strength grew in South Waziristan, local militant leaders reputedly became arrogant and brutal in their dealings with the tribes: They did not punish Taliban members who committed crimes, yet were quick to hand out harsh sentences to others, and they allowed petty thieves to join the movement.¹³⁵ In an ironic twist, Taliban commanders were also accused of taking bribes and bribing local political administrators. Additionally, because the movement prompted a crackdown by Pakistan’s military, hundreds of thousands were forced to evacuate the area to escape the fighting, creating hostility among the population.¹³⁶ Finally, the TTP’s campaign of suicide attacks caused the deaths of many Pakistani civilians, further alienating the people of South Waziristan.



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