

## COUNTERTERRORISM STRATEGY INITIATIVE POLICY PAPER

# THE BATTLE FOR PAKISTAN

## Militancy and Conflict in Bajaur

RAHMANULLAH, APRIL 2010

As a hub of Taliban and al-Qaeda activities, the Afghan province of Kunar has greatly influenced the conservative and traditional Pashtun tribesmen of Bajaur. After the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001, fleeing militants crossed the border into Bajaur.

Bajaur is the smallest of the seven administrative units of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of northwest Pakistan, a relatively inaccessible agency known for its hilly terrain. It borders Afghanistan's Kunar province and Pakistan's Dir district, a gateway to the Swat Valley in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), making it of strategic importance to Pakistan and the region.<sup>a</sup> The current population of Bajaur is more than 1 million, and the agency's administrative headquarters is the town of Khar.

As a hub of Taliban and al-Qaeda activities, the Afghan province of Kunar has greatly influenced the conservative and traditional Pashtun tribesmen of Bajaur. After the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001, fleeing militants crossed the border into Bajaur and exploited the tribal code of *Pashtunwali*, which requires hospitality and the giving of shelter. Bajauris treated the Afghan Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters as guests.<sup>1</sup> Bajaur still functions as a logistical base for the Taliban on both sides of the Durand Line, which divides Afghanistan and Pakistan. The agency's significance in terrorists' operational planning is illustrated by the fact that plots targeting London and Barcelona were

linked to al-Qaeda operatives based in Bajaur.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, a senior member of al-Qaeda, Abu Faraj al-Libbi, who was allegedly involved in attempts to assassinate Gen. Pervez Musharraf, then Pakistan's president, told interrogators after his arrest in 2005 that he had lived in Bajaur for some time.<sup>3</sup>

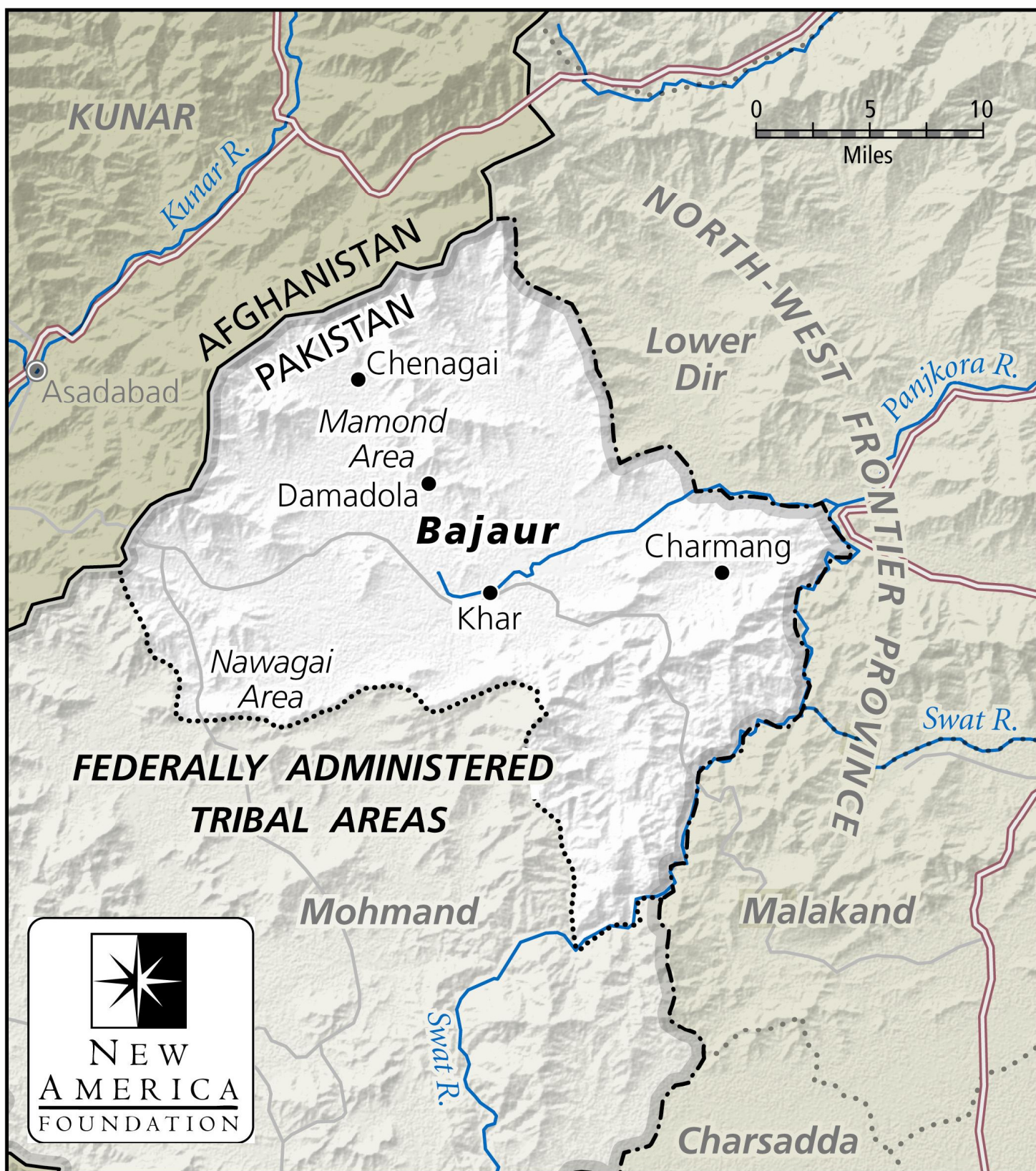
### The structure of the insurgency in Bajaur

Although the founder of the militant group Tehrik-i-Nifaz-i-Shariat-i-Mohammadi (TNSM), Sufi Muhammad, was agitating for the institution of *sharia*, or Islamic law, in the neighboring Malakand district as early as 1989, the Taliban movement did not truly emerge in Bajaur until the Taliban fell in 2001. Exploiting the fury felt by local Pashtuns at the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, Sufi Muhammad set up a recruiting camp for the nascent Taliban in Mamond *tehsil* (subdivision) in Bajaur. He was assisted by Maulvi Faqir Muhammad, who was then the commander of the Taliban in Bajaur and *naib amir*, or vice chief, of the TNSM.

In late 2001, Sufi Muhammad led a contingent of around 10,000 fighters to battle coalition forces across the border

<sup>a</sup> The NWFP is being renamed Khyber-Pukhtunkhwa.

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MAP BY GENE THORP OF CARTOGRAPHIC CONCEPTS, INC.



in Afghanistan, and hundreds of Bajauri militants were killed or captured; there are some reports that many still have not returned to Bajaur and are perhaps being held in Afghan jails.<sup>4</sup> A local journalist who accompanied Sufi Muhammad's forces to Afghanistan says that half have returned and half are still missing, either killed or imprisoned. Anwarullah, the journalist, said that Sufi Muhammad's supporters entered Kunar in eastern Afghanistan via the pass at Ghahi, some 30 kilometers (about 20 miles) northwest of Khar, the main town in Bajaur.<sup>5</sup>

After Musharraf, Pakistan's president, allied himself with the U.S. anti-Taliban efforts in Afghanistan, the Pakistani army's image was tarnished in the tribal areas. This, combined with the desire for revenge against the invading Americans, provided some of the basis for the Talibanization of Bajaur.

After Sufi Muhammad's return to Pakistan in early 2002, he and his son-in-law Maulana Fazlullah were arrested for raising a force against the Americans, further angering the populations of Bajaur and Swat. This anger helped unite Bajauri militants under the leadership of Maulvi Faqir Muhammad, whose supporters called over loudspeakers for donations and volunteers. After a slow start, Maulvi Faqir gradually built up a force of about 4,000 to 5,000 fighters in 2002 in the Mamond and Nawagai tehsils of Bajaur.<sup>6</sup> The local Taliban gave shelter to the Afghan and foreign fighters fleeing the conflict in Afghanistan, and at times incorporated the outsiders into their families via marriage.

However, as the war in Afghanistan continued and more Bajauris lost family members to the fighting, support for Sufi Muhammad's Taliban began to dwindle; he had left thousands of his fighters behind upon his return to Pakistan. But this disappointment was not enough to overcome Bajauris' dislike of the Afghan Northern Alliance and U.S. troops in Afghanistan, and fleeing Taliban fighters were able to regroup in Bajaur in the early 2000s.<sup>7</sup>

## Maulvi Faqir Muhammad and the TTP



Maulvi Faqir Muhammad, R // ANWAR ULLAH/AFP/Getty

Born in 1970 in Sewai, a village in Bajaur's Mamond tehsil near the Afghan border, Maulvi Faqir Muhammad belongs to the locally popular and powerful Mamond tribe. He fought against the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan in the 1980s and alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan during the 1990s.<sup>8</sup> Raised in a religious family, he started his education at a local *madrassa*, where his teacher was the widely respected Maulana Abdus Salam, who belonged to the Deobandi sect of Islam but was not involved in politics or militancy, according to researcher Sohail Abdul Nasir. Under Abdus Salam, Maulvi Faqir achieved the *Dars-e-Nizami*, which is equal to graduation, in the 1990s. He also studied the Quran at the Darul-Uloom Panjpir, a seminary in the Swabi district of the NWFP,<sup>b</sup> which promotes a Wahhabist ideology similar to that followed in Saudi Arabia.<sup>9</sup>

Physically, Maulvi Faqir is tall and well-built, and wears a long, Taliban-style black beard. He has only one wife, but his family is large and nearly everyone associated with him is allegedly involved with his militant activities.<sup>10</sup> Before he became involved with the TNSM in 1993 or 1994 after being mentored by TNSM founder Sufi Muhammad,

<sup>b</sup> The NWFP has recently been renamed Khyber-Pukhtunkhwa.

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Maulvi Faqir was a local leader of Jamaat-e-Islami, an Islamist political party popular in the tribal areas. After joining the TNSM, he accompanied Sufi Muhammad in his disastrous attempt in late 2001 to reinforce the Afghan Taliban with Pakistani fighters to battle the Americans. He was allegedly joined in Afghanistan by his two sons and two first cousins, Maulvi Mohammed Karim and Maulvi John Mohammed, according to Nasir's research.<sup>11</sup>

Today, Maulvi Faqir commands around 6,000 fighters,<sup>12</sup> including about 500 Afghans and about 100 other foreign fighters, mostly Arabs and Chechens. Uzbek fighters are present in the Charmang area of Bajaur's Nawagai tehsil, commanded by Qari Zia ur-Rehman, who according to security sources also trains other foreign fighters.<sup>13</sup> Maulvi Faqir was one of the founders of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the umbrella organization formed in December 2007 to unite the various factions of the Pakistani Taliban, first headed by Baitullah Mehsud.

As Baitullah's right-hand man, Maulvi Faqir repeatedly pledged his loyalty to the head of the Quetta Shura Taliban, Mullah Omar, showing that he believes the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban movements are two sides of the same coin. According to a local Mehsud *khan*, or landowner, Maulvi Faqir told a large gathering in Sewai in 2008, "We think of Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden as our supreme leaders, though Osama has not spent a night with me. But if he comes, we will welcome him."<sup>14</sup> Another local, Imran Khan, heard Maulvi Faqir announce his support for Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden during a broadcast on his FM radio station, saying, "We and Maulvi Omar are one; there is no difference in our movements."<sup>15</sup>

The Quetta Shura Taliban have no known operational links with militant groups in Bajaur, however. The Taliban groups in Bajaur primarily target the Pakistani state, while the Taliban in Afghanistan – those fighters led by the Quetta Shura and Mullah Omar – focus mainly on hostilities against U.S. and NATO forces. In fact, some Taliban in Afghanistan don't want the Taliban fighters in

Pakistan to use the term "Taliban" because it may damage the group's popular support. The "code of conduct"<sup>16</sup> chalked out by the Taliban in Afghanistan in the summer of 2009, similarly, has had no effect on the Taliban in Bajaur.<sup>17</sup>

Maulvi Faqir has also expressed his support for al-Qaeda, has come out in favor of the TTP's targeting of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, and has commented about the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States,<sup>18</sup> "Things have changed for the better [after 9/11], it has sustained this struggle. It has awakened Muslims, and the *Ummah* [community] has come to know who their enemy is. If the attack had taken place earlier, many Muslim lands would be free from foreign occupation by now." The Pakistani government has offered a reward of 15 million rupees (\$180,000) for his capture.<sup>19</sup>

Like Sufi Muhammad and his son-in-law Maulana Fazlullah in the Swat Valley, Maulvi Faqir seems to understand the importance of radio outreach. His sermons on his illegal FM channel can be heard across Bajaur. Because his broadcasting equipment is easily assembled and mobile, Pakistani security forces have been unable to stop his propagandizing. Maulvi Faqir has also made himself available to the news media, giving occasional interviews and claiming to local journalists that he was the interim chief of the TTP after rumors of Baitullah's death swirled in late August 2009.<sup>20</sup>

Besides Afghans and some other foreigners, followers of Islamist groups such as the banned Jaish-e-Mohammad and the TNSM are also attached to Maulvi Faqir. The Taliban commander and these groups run combined courts in Bajaur, mete out similar punishments for alleged spies, and hold joint *jirgas*, or assemblies, to discuss matters critical to the militancy in Bajaur. "Their names are different, but there is no apparent difference between them," said a local senior journalist, Haji Babibullah Khan.<sup>21</sup> Maulvi Faqir is also suspected to have close ties with al-Qaeda's number two leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri,

and is believed to have hosted a dinner for the terrorist leader in Damadola in January 2006 that was targeted by a suspected U.S. drone strike.<sup>22</sup> In early March 2010, Maulvi Faqir was reported killed by a Pakistani airstrike in the Mohmand tribal agency, but a Reuters reporter received a phone call later in which a man who identified himself as Maulvi Faqir said he was fine and called reports of his death “propaganda”; the reporter said he recognized the voice.<sup>23</sup> Maulvi Faqir later phoned the BBC’s Peshawar office and confirmed that he and his fighters were safe.<sup>24</sup>

There have been rumors that Maulvi Faqir was replaced as the Taliban leader in Bajaur by Jamal ud-Din Dadullah, the TTP’s vice amir in the agency, because Maulvi Faqir ordered his followers not to fight Pakistani forces during the 2010 military operations in Bajaur, thus irritating prominent Taliban leaders who continually target the Pakistani state.<sup>25</sup> Jamal ud-Din Dadullah hails from the Markhano Zangal Wara Mamond tehsil, northwest of Khar, and has some religious education from the Pamjpeer seminary, but not much else is known about him. Maulvi Faqir denies being replaced, but acknowledges ongoing conflicts with other Taliban leaders in Bajaur.<sup>26</sup>

### Other militant groups in Bajaur

Though the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the TNSM are the major militant groups in Bajaur, several other jihadist groups also operate there. Jaish-i-Islami is headed by Qari Ali Rehman, a militant from the Yusuf Khel tribe of the Loi Mamond tehsil,<sup>27</sup> and is active in Loi Mamond tehsil. Before becoming the head of Jaish-i-Islami in 2008, he was a high-ranking security guard for Maulvi Faqir.<sup>28</sup> Jaish-i-Islami was upset when Maulvi Faqir did not react to the Pakistani army offensive in Bajaur and accused him of collusion with the government, so there is some tension in their relationship.<sup>29</sup>

Harkatul Jihadul Islami (HUJI), a Punjabi outfit of militants once headed by Qari Saifullah Akhtar, is also active in Bajaur. Pakistani intelligence claims that Akhtar

and the HUJI were involved in the September 2008 suicide attack on the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad as well as other suicide bombings across the country, including the attack on former prime minister Benazir Bhutto’s convoy when she arrived in Karachi on October 18, 2007.<sup>30</sup>

Two Uzbek groups, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and a splinter group, the Islamic Jihad Union, also have some roots in Bajaur and neighboring Kunar in Afghanistan, though they are not believed to have more than 100 or so fighters.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, there are Arab militants in Bajaur, most of whom crossed into the agency after the fall of the Taliban government in Afghanistan in 2001.<sup>32</sup> Maulvi Faqir is skilled at uniting the various jihadist groups in Bajaur, and his support for Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden is a good indicator that some of these Arabs in Bajaur may be al-Qaeda fighters.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to Maulvi Faqir, there are a handful of other important Taliban commanders in Bajaur: Pervez, who goes by one name, controls Nawagai tehsil, west of Khar; Zia ur-Rehman, an Afghan, administers the area of Charmang along the border with Kunar; Maulana Ismail supervises the Taliban in Chenagai and Damadola; Maulvi Abdullah heads the movement in the Banda region in Salarzai tehsil; and Wali ur-Rehman controls the Irab area of Loi Mamond tehsil. These commanders have a very strong communications system and seek direction from Maulvi Faqir when possible. However, during military operations, when contact is limited because of security concerns, each of these local leaders has sole authority for militant activities in his region.<sup>34</sup>

Bordering Afghanistan’s Kunar province, a stronghold of insurgent commander Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, many of the Afghan refugees who fled to Bajaur after the fall of the Taliban government in 2001 were supportive of Gulbuddin. However, most of these refugees left the agency after the Pakistani Army launched its operations in Bajaur in the summer of 2008. A small number of Afghan refugees still living in Bajaur support the religious political party Jamaat-

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i-Islami, which has strong links with Hezb-i-Islami, Gulbuddin's insurgent group. However, Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin has no known links with local anti-Pakistan militants, as Gulbuddin has ties with the Pakistani government and Taliban fighters in Bajaur have been attacking the Pakistani state.<sup>35</sup>

## Training camps

The Taliban in Bajaur run a network of mobile training camps in forests, at the bottom of hills, and in religious schools abandoned by the Pakistani government. Some of the camps are located in Ambar, about 70 kilometers (43 miles) south of Khar on the border with Mohmand, and in Charmang, near the Mohmand and Afghan borders.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, militants have captured some individual homes in Loi Sam, about 12 kilometers (7 miles) west of Khar, to use as camps. Other locations, according to local officials, include the Malasaid and Banda areas of Salarzai, the Kaga area of Mamond, and the Damadola area. The Pakistani army asserts it has now cleared the Damadola area and advanced to other areas.<sup>37</sup> At the camps, which are moved frequently because of security concerns, newly recruited militants are given training in firing rocket launchers and in making and defusing bombs. Most of the bombs and suicide vests are homemade, with components including cooking oil, ball bearings, nuts and bolts, and nails. The Taliban in Bajaur also retain a number of weapons used by their forerunners in Afghanistan against the Soviets in the 1980s. In general, recruits don't need much training with firearms, as they have been accustomed to using Kalashnikov assault rifles since childhood.

## Financing

Many Pakistani officials believe the Taliban in Pakistan have access to foreign funds, and Owais Ahmed Ghani, the governor of North-West Frontier Province, has frequently said that Afghanistan's "narcomafia" contributes funds to the Pakistani Taliban.<sup>38</sup> In February 2010, he estimated that the TTP spends nearly 3.6 billion rupees (about \$4.3

million) on 15,000 fighters in Pakistan, citing the opium trade as a main source of income.<sup>39</sup> Though Bajaur is not directly involved in Afghanistan's opium traffic, its border with the country ensures that it is affected. Taliban militants in Bajaur also engage in timber smuggling, collection of funds from local mosques, *bahtta* (forced taxes on local citizens), and kidnapping for ransom to support the movement.

## Tactics: Suicide bombings

While suicide bombings in the FATA overall are masterminded by TTP commander Qari Hussain, who is based in South Waziristan and was the right-hand man of the late Baitullah Mehsud, suicide attackers are also trained and deployed in Bajaur. Qari Hussain has the ability to send suicide attackers anywhere in the FATA, including Bajaur.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, the efforts of Maulana Fazlullah to encourage suicide attacks against Pakistani government and military targets in the Swat Valley have spread to Bajaur. The Swat Taliban leader said in July 2007, "Through suicide bombings, Muslim youths are showing the world they can use their bones and flesh as bullets to strike the infidels."<sup>41</sup> Locals have heard Maulvi Faqir tell gatherings in various towns of Bajaur that the TTP has several suicide bombers. He claimed that the fighters feel honored to become *fidayeen* (the term used for suicide bombers by the Taliban). Locals have also heard him say that even women now want to become suicide bombers.<sup>42</sup>

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In his frequent speeches during 2008 and 2009 across Bajaur, Maulvi Faqir also boasted of having large numbers of suicide bombers and recruits at his disposal, claiming

that suicide attackers are highly revered both by the Taliban before their missions and in heaven. A Taliban suicide bomber attacked a police checkpoint in Khar on January 31, 2010, killing at least 17 and illustrating that even after a series of Pakistani military operations, the movement retains its ability to strike in the heart of Bajaur.

## Military operations in Bajaur

### Drone strikes

In mid-January 2006, a suspected U.S. drone strike destroyed a house in Damadola, a hamlet in northern Bajaur northwest of Khar, killing as many as 22 people in an attack believed to have targeted al-Qaeda deputy leader Ayman al-Zawahiri at a dinner celebrating Eid.<sup>43</sup> Though al-Zawahiri escaped, his son-in-law, who was reputedly involved with al-Qaeda's media arm and Abu Obaidah al-Masri, al-Qaeda operations chief for Afghanistan's Kunar province, were among those killed.<sup>44</sup>

An attack in late October 2006 demolished a madrassa a few kilometers away in Chenagai, a village in the Mamond area. Although the strike was reportedly carried out by Pakistani forces with helicopters, some local sources claimed it was a drone strike, again likely targeting al-Zawahiri.<sup>45</sup> More than 80 suspected militants were killed in the attack, though villagers claimed the dead were students in the madrassa, and the TNSM leader of the religious



FAROOQ NAEEM/AFP/Getty Images

school, Maulana Liaqat, also died. The October attack came two days after some 3,000 militants held a rally in Sadiq Abad, about five kilometers west of Khar, chanting slogans of support for Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar.<sup>46</sup>

Maulvi Faqir was outraged at the casualties. He addressed a crowd of gunmen and supporters in the rubble of the building, saying, "May Allah protect Sheikh Osama. May Allah protect Mullah Omar," and melodramatically claiming that he wished he too had been martyred.<sup>47</sup>

The two airstrikes in 2006 roused the sentiments of Bajauris against the Pakistani government and the United States, and Maulvi Faqir's fiery speeches helped mobilize support for the Taliban in Bajaur. Just over a week after the second strike, Taliban fighters carried out a suicide attack on a Pakistani army base in Dargai, 100 kilometers (62 miles) north of Peshawar in Malakand, specifically to avenge the madrassa attack.<sup>48</sup> It was the deadliest such attack to date against the Pakistani military, killing at least 40 soldiers and wounding 22. A military spokesman, Maj. Gen. Shaukat Sultan, said, "We strongly suspect the attack on the army center was done by the people trained in Bajaur in the madrassa run by al-Qaeda facilitators Maulvi Liaqat and Maulvi Faqir."<sup>49</sup>

Maulvi Faqir launched a large-scale recruitment drive for his Taliban group, and by 2006 he had amassed thousands of fighters under his command. By early 2007, Bajaur was largely under Taliban control; between that summer and August 2008, Taliban fighters had reportedly captured about 150 Pakistani military outposts in the agency.<sup>50</sup>

Suspected U.S. drones have reportedly struck Bajaur at least two more times. One attack, in May 2008 in Damadola, killed al-Qaeda planner Abu Sulayman al-Jazairi, an Algerian believed to have been plotting attacks against the West, and about a dozen others.<sup>51</sup> Another reported strike, in late October 2009, targeted Maulvi Faqir, who just minutes earlier had left the house that was destroyed; about 30 people were killed, including Maulvi



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Faqir's nephew and son-in-law.<sup>52</sup> The strike apparently was aimed at a meeting of a Taliban *shura*, or council, in Bajaur.

### Pakistani military offensives in Bajaur

After the ill-equipped and under-trained Frontier Corps had failed to flush out Taliban fighters under the leadership of Maulvi Faqir Muhammad, the Pakistani army was sent to Bajaur in the summer of 2008. The intent was to clear the area of Taliban militants, who had established a parallel government in the agency, controlled local market prices, forbid barbers to shave beards, and opposed polio vaccination campaigns. Operation Sherdil ("Lion's Heart"), begun in early August 2008, was also intended to slow the flow of militants across the border into Afghanistan's Kunar province.<sup>53</sup> <sup>54</sup> Local officials claim that more than 20,000 troops, including Bajaur conscripts and Army soldiers backed by helicopter gunships, tanks, and artillery, were fighting against 2,500 to 3,000 Taliban in Bajaur.<sup>55</sup> However, other estimates put the number of Pakistani troops at around 8,000.<sup>56</sup>

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During the first few months of fighting, the army did not have much success, as it seemed to underestimate the strength of the Bajaur Taliban and had weak intelligence on the ground.<sup>57</sup> Security forces were also apparently unaware of the long tunnels dug by the Taliban for storing weapons and for protection from Pakistani jets. Habibullah Khan, a top official in the FATA Secretariat, said in September 2008, "These tunnels are called *asmasta* and some of them are about half a mile, and insurgents can stay there a long time to protect themselves from security forces' shelling."<sup>58</sup> On September 20, 2008, the offensive in Bajaur assumed increased significance as a suicide truck bomber detonated his explosives outside the five-star Marriott Hotel in

Islamabad, killing more than 50 and wounding at least 250<sup>59</sup> in the deadliest attack in the Pakistani capital to date.<sup>60</sup> Pakistani officials claimed the hotel was targeted because the speaker of the National Assembly, Fahmida Mirza, was to host a dinner there for Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani and President Asif Ali Zardari, who had just given his first speech to Parliament,<sup>61</sup> though the administration denied the hotel had been booked in advance.<sup>62</sup> (Pakistani officials claimed they had inquired about rates for using the hotel's space but never officially booked it.)<sup>63</sup> Suspicion eventually landed on Harkatul Jihadul Islami (HUJI), which has its roots in Bajaur, and Muhammad Qari Zafar, a Punjabi Taliban leader with ties to the al-Qaeda-linked Lashkar-e-Jhangvi; he was the suspected mastermind of the attack.<sup>64</sup> Zardari condemned the "cowardly attack," and Pakistan intensified its military operations in Bajaur.<sup>65</sup>

The dean of Western reporters in South Asia, Carlotta Gall, wrote about six weeks into Operation Sherdil that, after Waziristan, "Bajaur is perhaps the most significant stronghold of militants from the Taliban and Al Qaeda who have entrenched themselves in the tribal areas." She and co-author Ismail Khan quoted officials as saying that the militants were using everything they had to hold their ground. The officials also expressed surprise at the level of resistance and the sophistication of the militants' tactics, weapons, and communications.<sup>66</sup> "Even the sniper rifles they use are better than some of ours," one official said. "Their tactics are mind-boggling and they have defenses that would take us days to build. It does not look as though we are fighting a ragtag militia. They are fighting like an organized force."

As the Pakistani military operations continued in the fall of 2008, however, the Taliban's communications systems were slowly dismantled and the militants ceased patrolling in broad daylight in Mamond and Salarzai.<sup>67</sup> Security forces also shut down banned the Taliban's illegal FM channel and destroyed several Taliban training camps. By late



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September, Pakistani authorities claimed that more than 1,000 militants had been killed in the Bajaur operations.<sup>68</sup>

Meanwhile, informal tribal *lashkars*, or militias, were being mobilized in Bajaur in frustration over the Pakistani government's inconsistent response to the militant threat in the region.<sup>69</sup> Though the *lashkars* were not formally used until 2008, some pro-government *maliks* and their supporters had been targeted by the Taliban as early as 2007: hundreds<sup>70</sup> of influential tribal elders and *lashkar* followers were killed by Taliban attacks in Pakistan's seven tribal agencies and in the settled areas of Dir, Swat, and Buner districts of the NWFP. The tribal militias were attacked almost immediately by Taliban fighters, who came by the hundreds under the command of Qari Zia ur-Rehman.<sup>71</sup>

One area of Bajaur where the *lashkars* have had more success is Salarzai, because the Taliban never had strong roots there.<sup>72</sup> A Salarzai elder said his tribe was annoyed that the Pakistani government was unable to provide security for Bajauris, hence the formation of tribal *lashkars*.<sup>73</sup> Some members of the Salarzai tribe believe the targeted killings of *lashkar* leaders were the work of the Inter-Services Intelligence agency, attempting to keep the Taliban's influence as a hedge against the U.S. and NATO presence in Afghanistan.<sup>74</sup> However, there is no evidence of this.

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After months of pitched battles that displaced some half a million Pakistanis and destroyed nearly 5,000 homes,<sup>76</sup> Maulvi Faqir declared a unilateral cease-fire in late February 2009, saying in a 30-minute radio address, "We don't want

to fight the army, but some elements have been creating misunderstandings between us. ... Pakistan is our country and the Pakistan army is our army."<sup>77</sup> Four days later, the army suspended its operations in Bajaur.<sup>78</sup> In early March, the army declared victory over the militants in Bajaur and the government signed a 28-point agreement with the leading Mamond tribe, and later the Tarkani and Utman Khel, that required the tribe to surrender key TTP figures to Pakistani authorities, lay down arms, and stop supporting militants.<sup>79</sup> In the past, however, such agreements have provided the Taliban with a chance to regroup; this seems to have occurred in the summer and fall of 2009.<sup>80</sup>

Pro-government forces in Bajaur had prominent success in August 2009 with the capture of Taliban spokesman Maulvi Omar, a deputy of Maulvi Faqir who had reputedly orchestrated several suicide blasts and attacks on security forces. He was arrested by local fighters of an anti-Taliban *lashkar* in neighboring Mohmand.<sup>81</sup>

In late January 2010, the Pakistani military began another series of operations in Bajaur, involving some 4,000 troops including Tochi scouts, Bajaur scouts, the 25<sup>th</sup> Punjab Regiment, and the 14<sup>th</sup> Punjab Regiment. The troops, backed by helicopter gunships, faced about 2,000 Taliban fighters in the battle.<sup>82</sup> After about a week of fighting, several dozen militants surrendered to security forces, who were able to take control of the strategically important town of Damadola, Maulvi Faqir's home town.<sup>83</sup>

Among those who surrendered was Masud Salar, Taliban commander in the Kas area of Mamond.<sup>84</sup> In mid-March, a prominent commander called Khalifa surrendered along with nearly 40 of his men in Khar, promising never to take up arms again.<sup>85</sup> After claiming full control of Damadola, the army hoisted the Pakistani flag. "We have completely defeated the Taliban," Maj. Gen. Tariq Hayat, inspector general of the Frontier Corps, told reporters.<sup>86</sup> A Pakistani army spokesman, Maj. Gen. Athar Abbas, asserted that the army had taken control of 90 to 95 percent of Bajaur and

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had killed 50 to 60 militants, while losing 10 security personnel.<sup>87</sup>

The people of Mamond welcomed the military operation, believing that this time the army was serious about eradicating militants from Bajaur. A Bajauri named Bakhtawar Shah said the people showed full support for the army, as they hoped it would restore peace in the area.<sup>88</sup> Additionally, locals said they were pleased to see the Pakistani flag flying over Damadola and were not giving shelter to fleeing Taliban fighters.<sup>89</sup> An elder of the Salarzai tribe, Malak Manasib, said the local militias will continue to cooperate with the government to clear Bajaur of militants. The Salarzais have announced that they will fine those cooperating with the Taliban 2 million rupees and burn their houses.<sup>90</sup>

## Tribal structure of Bajaur

Tarkani and Utman Khel are the two major tribes in Bajaur. They are subdivided as shown below.<sup>91</sup>

### Tarkani

- Salarzai
- Mamond (Salarzai, Kakazi)
- Chamarkand
- Charmang
- Nawagai
- Khar

### Utman Khel

- Aseel
- Shamoza
- Mandal
- Lar-tras
- Bar-tras
- Arang
- Ali Zai

The Tarkanis, in whom the extremists have their roots, have about half a million members and live in five of the

seven tehsils in Bajaur: Mamond, Chamarkand, Charmang, Salarzai, and Nawagai. Maulvi Faqir, former TTP spokesman Maulvi Omar, and the head of Bajaur's Taliban courts, Mufti Bashir, are all Tarkanis. He is commonly known Bashir in the area hail from Mamond. In the Utman Khel tribe, the important elders are Mian Masud Jan of the Chenagai area, Haji Qadir Khan of the Alizo area, Malik Naushad of the Batai area, and Haji Bismullah Khan of the Nawagai area. In general, the Taliban have been unable to exercise control over these powerful tribal leaders, who have established anti-Taliban lashkars in their areas.<sup>92</sup>

## Grievances of the population

Poverty, a low literacy rate, deficient health facilities, and unemployment are major issues in all seven agencies of the FATA, and have been generally ignored by Pakistan's central government for years. The pervasive poverty – about 60 percent of FATA residents live below the poverty line – is often mentioned as a possible factor contributing to the militancy of the region.<sup>93</sup> Naveed Ahmad Shinwari, a researcher in the FATA, observed, “Natural resources are under-exploited in the FATA and the majority of the local population depends on agriculture, transport, arms manufacturing and trade, drug-trafficking, cross border trade (or so called smuggling) and shop-keeping. ... Entire families often depend on a single person's income. In the absence of any employment opportunities, the temptation for young people ... to get involved in other activities -- including crime and religious extremism -- is strong.”<sup>94</sup>

Researcher Safiya Aftab wrote for the Pak Institute for Peace Studies in 2008 that “poverty and a lack of job prospects may very well be strong contributing factors” behind militancy in the FATA, but “poverty is endemic across Pakistan, and employment prospects are at best highly variable.”<sup>95</sup> Pakistani Interior Minister Rehman Malik has repeatedly told both Pakistani and international media that the Taliban pay handsome salaries to their fighters. “It is clear that the country's enemies and the hired killers of the Taliban want to continue their activities

to keep their masters happy. In all these activities which we investigated, all roads lead to South Waziristan,” Malik told reporters outside Parliament in October 2009.<sup>96</sup> South Waziristan is considered a safe haven for al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and foreign fighters, and significant militant commanders like TTP chief Baitullah Mehsud have been killed there by drone strikes.

There are a total of 17 health clinics<sup>97</sup> units in Bajaur and one general hospital in Khar, the agency’s administrative center – not nearly enough to meet the needs of Bajaur’s million-plus residents. Similarly, the 615 schools in Bajaur, frequently targeted by suspected Taliban militants opposed to education, are not enough for the 90,000 students in the agency.<sup>98</sup>

Abdul Qayum, a resident of Bai Cheena in Khar tehsil, said: “There are meager health facilities in Bajaur, but there is almost no concept of shifting women to dispensaries during delivery times, as our women cannot get good treatment at these dispensaries.” According to Hanifullah, a resident of Nawakaly in Khar tehsil, “We have no objection to the army operation, but the government should provide us jobs, as military operations cannot fill our stomachs.”<sup>99</sup>

There is also little infrastructure in Bajaur, such as paved roads. Ahmad Khan, a farmer in the Doda area of Nawagai tehsil, said, “We cannot ship our produce to market in time due to a lack of roads, so most of our crops rot, at a great loss for us. And we don’t know our sin, for which the government has punished us for over 60 years.”<sup>100</sup>

Additionally, local tribal elders are wary of both fear both the Pakistani army and the Taliban, as neither has brought peace to Bajaur.<sup>101</sup> Malik Abdul Nasir of Salarzai tehsil commented, “We assist security forces to maintain peace and tranquility in our area, as the lashkar fighters and security forces have common foes.” Another tribal elder, of Tali area of Salarzai tehsil, said, “Our fighters and security forces do joint patrolling to clean the area of militants, as security forces are not well aware of the area’s traditions.



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We help provide them secret information and also help them in open fighting against the militants. There is no question of leaving us alone at the needed hours, as we fight for a common cause --that is, to eliminate Taliban from Bajaur.”<sup>102</sup>

As many as half a million Bajauris were displaced from the agency during the Pakistani military operations in the fall of 2008, causing great frustration among residents with both the state and the Taliban. Some of these displaced people have since returned home from shelters in the NWFP areas of Mardan, Swabi, and Peshawar, but many still live in Jalojai, Nowshera, and camps outside Peshawar, the provincial capital.<sup>103</sup> A resident of the Jalojai camp commented, “If there were no Taliban, there would be no army,” expressing his rage at both while asserting that Pakistani helicopters caused unnecessary civilian casualties during the Bajaur operations.<sup>104</sup> Another resident, from Damadola, wants the Pakistani government to rebuild his home, which was destroyed in the military operations.<sup>105</sup>

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