



Asian Conflicts Reports

Spotlight on the Death of Osama bin Laden

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The Death of Osama bin Laden

Carl Ungerer

The death of the al-Qaeda leader, Osama bin Laden, closes an important chapter in the West's global fight against international terrorism.

Bin Laden was the founder and financier of al-Qaeda in its early days in Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. But it was his role in Afghanistan that changed the course of history. Along with hundreds of other mujahideen, bin Laden's group trained and funded the nineteen individuals who conducted the now infamous 'airlines plot' against the United States in September 2001.

Since then, bin Laden has remained an elusive figure, hiding in the mountains of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Under pressure from Western counter-terrorism forces, the core al-Qaeda leadership had lost its ability to direct global terrorist operations, but became an important ideological base for propaganda and preaching hate.

His death in the Pakistani city of Abbottabad following a nine month intelligence operation raises several important questions. The Pakistani military will be asked to reveal what they knew of bin Laden's location. If there is any suggestion that he had been provided safe harbor, it will complicate counter-terrorism cooperation efforts at a crucial time in the fight against the Taliban in neighboring Afghanistan. And it will further undermine confidence that the Pakistani intelligence services are working on the same page.

The operation to kill bin Laden highlights both the difficulty and the importance of collecting good human intelligence in terrorism cases. Although details of the operation will remain classified, a nine-month operation to track down credible sources on bin Laden's whereabouts shows how critical human sources are in these matters. For too long, Western intelligence agencies thought that they could rely on technical means to defeat terrorist networks. This case highlights the opposite – human intelligence is the key.

Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Egyptian ideologue and long time deputy to bin Laden, remains at large. As the more intellectual of the two, al-Zawahiri's influence was equally important. Through his video messages and statements, al-Qaeda's narrative of ultra-violent terrorism in the name of religion will continue to resonate with Islamist groups from Morocco to Indonesia. So despite bin Laden's death, the global jihadist movement will not give up their fight against the West.

Retribution for bin Laden's death is likely, although precisely when and where remains unclear. Many jihadist groups saw bin Laden as a spiritual figure, and they will now see him as a shahid – a martyr for the Islamist cause.

Western security agencies will take recent threats of unleashing a 'nuclear firestorm' with a grain of salt. Despite several amateurish attempts to buy nuclear materials, there is no evidence that bin Laden's group ever managed to get close to a nuclear weapon.

But their appetite for mass casualty events remains clear. And, although nuclear, chemical and biological weapons are difficult to find and harder to use, these weapons in the hands of the al-Qaeda group would have devastating consequences.

The organizational and operational hub of al-Qaeda has clearly shifted to North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Charismatic individuals like the American born Yemeni teacher Anwar al-Awlaki, are now potentially far more dangerous than bin Laden. Awlaki's ability to preach hate over the internet in English can reach a new generation of Islamists in the West seeking justification for political grievances.

Since it was founded nearly two decades ago, Al-Qaeda has become a very modern organization. It is franchised but leaderless. It operates through the internet, which facilitates the idea of a global community. Increasingly, it functions as a network of networks, with individuals co-opted into operations as needs arise.

But al-Qaeda's global pretensions bulge with paradox. It is networked social order, without a society. It is atomized without individualism. And the narrative of returning to an ideal form of a 7th century Islamic caliphate finds resonance in Western cosmopolitan cities like London, Sydney and Paris.

President Obama made it clear that the fight against terrorism does not end with bin Laden. America will continue to fight the 'long war' against al-Qaeda and will expect continuing support from allies such as Australia.

Further terrorist attacks are most likely in South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. But that will not prevent al-Qaeda from continuing to target the West. Terrorism will therefore remain a strategic priority for Western governments and a key driver of national security policy.

1

The possibility that the Pakistani military offered safe harbor to bin Laden will complicate counter-terrorism cooperation at a crucial time in the fight against the Taliban in Afghanistan

2

Charismatic new leaders like the American born Yemeni Anwar al-Awlaki are now potentially far more dangerous than bin Laden was

3

Retribution attacks are most likely in South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, the new organizational and operational hub of al-Qaeda

The Death of Osama: The View from Malaysia

Kamarulnizam Abdullah



1

Malaysian security forces have stepped up security measures at facilities and locations with ties to the United States such as the US Embassy and consulates

2

Al-Qaeda's confirmation of the death of its leader was greeted with widespread sympathy among Malay Muslims

3

The death of Osama may incite widespread sympathy from individual, self-radicalized terrorists or lone-wolf suicide bombers in Southeast Asia

Is Osama really dead? This was the first question raised by ordinary Malaysians when local television channels beamed the surprising news of the killing of bin Laden into their homes on a Labor Day holiday. Over the following days, news of Osama's death became the major headline in the mainstream electronic and printed media.

Malaysian leaders were unequivocal in expressing their relief and hopes that the world would now become safer and more just. In the view of Prime Minister Najib Razak, the death of one of the al-Qaeda founding fathers could not only restore the image of Islam but also begin to repair strained relations between the West and the Muslim world. In contrast, Home Minister, Hishammuddin Hussein, warned that the news would have little concrete security impact on Malaysia since the country was never a primary target of terrorist groups and had suffered no terrorist attacks. The major focus of Malaysia has been and will continue to be on keeping terrorist networks like al-Qaeda and its associates in Southeast Asia from training and running operations and networks from within Malaysia. Nonetheless, Malaysian security forces have stepped up security measures, particularly at facilities and locations with ties to the United States, such as the US Embassy and consulates, fearing possible backlashes from regional militants Islamic movements. The embassies and interests of other countries, especially Britain, Pakistan and Japan – were also placed under strict surveillance from the Malaysian police.

Malaysians, especially Malay-Muslims, express a range of reactions – disbelief, discontent, anger – concerning news of bin Laden's death. The initial sentiment was that the United States' security forces might have misidentified their target, especially when rumors emerged spread that the photos of Osama bin Laden's body were doctored. Al-Qaeda's confirmation of the death of its leader, however, was greeted with widespread sympathy among the Malay Muslims rather than celebrations as were seen at Ground Zero and the White House gates. It is interesting to note that discussions on Malaysian blogs and social networks like Twitter and Facebook focused harsh criticism on the US military action. In the view of some local bloggers, the US government still misguidedly focuses on killing individual terrorists rather than to addressing the root causes of terrorism and extremism. International injustice, the United States' alleged blind support towards Israel, and its involvements in Middle East current political turmoil are viewed by many bloggers as recipes for a continued flourishing of terrorist attacks and activities.

Local Malay newspapers have sensationalized Osama's death to a degree that threatens to undermine the United States' image among Malaysians. An influential Malay language newspaper, *Mingguan Malaysia* in its weekend edition, for instance, conducted a one-page interview with a respected popular local scholar, who argued that America's hegemonic global agenda is more dangerous to the rest of the world than al-Qaeda itself. For him, al-Qaeda was just another creation of the US during the Cold War period.

The death of Osama bin Laden does not necessarily signal an end to terrorism. In fact, it is possible that al-Qaeda will escalate its operations, motivated by rage over the killing of their leaders whom they now venerate as a martyr. The death of Osama does not mean the death of al-Qaeda. On the regional front, al-Qaeda might not be able to restore its partnership with a crippled Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). Continuous attacks by the Indonesian anti-terrorist squad, Detachment-88, and expanded regional security cooperation on counter-terrorism and intelligence gathering have effectively decapitated JI and weakened its regional networking.

The death of Osama might also garner widespread sympathy from individual, self-radicalized terrorists or lone-wolf suicide bombers. Such suicide-bombers are not a new phenomenon in Southeast Asia's history of terrorist threats. In southern Thailand, the long and protracted conflict has resulted in scores of suicide-bombing incidents. In Indonesia, the two Bali and Jakarta bombings were vivid reminders of suicide-bombers threats. Recently, a suicide-bomber attack in a mosque in Cirebon, Indonesia that wounded nearly 28 people and a planned attack by two terror suspects on a church ahead of Eastern celebrations last April stand as clear indications that terrorists in Southeast Asia, far from giving up, have shifted their tactics and strategies in two important ways. First, future terrorist attacks in the region will not necessarily imply a JI's or al-Qaeda's association. Attacks might be carried out by resentful or fanatical individual motivated by personal obdurate religious beliefs. Second, Osama ben Laden could become a powerful mythic icon, like socialist Che Guevera, for would-be terrorists among impatient, alienated, and angry youth. Osama bin Laden has, perhaps permanently, revolutionized some Muslims' responses to international injustice and American hegemony. Hence, terrorism is unlikely to end, but will continue with more lethal, personalized, and uncoordinated attacks.

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The Death of Osama: The View from Pakistan

Saroj Kumar Rath



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South Asian newspapers reported that Pakistani army chief Gen. Pervez Kayani the former ISI chief is suspected of having harbored bin Laden

2

Afghan and Pakistani Taliban have pledged revenge, and there have been over 20 militant attacks in Pakistani since the death of bin Laden

3

The Pakistani military may orchestrate another border conflict with India or organize another Mumbai-like attack to deflect attention from its recent intelligence failures

The killing of Osama bin Laden in May 2011 raises three important questions for Pakistan. First, what was the role of the ISI in pursuing and/or harboring bin Laden and what affect will that have on its relationship with the United States? Second, how can a deeply-divided Pakistani security establishment reduce the risk that popular anger over the US raid and bin Laden's death will not result in increased domestic terrorism and political unrest? Third, what are the implications for Pakistan of a possible shift in the US strategy in Afghanistan?

Over recent years, the United States has deployed more Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agents in Pakistan than any other country. Estimates vary, with Pakistani analysts assessing the number in the thousands, Pakistani government sources claiming 500, and American officials stating around 100. The reason for this heavy presence was that the US was certain that Osama bin Laden was present in Pakistan. Through their increased presence, the CIA was able to locate bin Laden's abode, and he has since been killed.

In Pakistan it is rumored that there was an official support network surrounding bin Laden. Extracting the truth from the shadowy Pakistani Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) agency about the possible involvement of Pakistani officials in harboring Osama is, however, almost impossible. The building in Abbotabad where bin Laden was killed by US Navy SEALs, is suspected by some to be an ISI safe house. South Asian newspapers reported that Pakistani army chief Gen. Pervez Kayani, the former ISI chief, is amongst the main suspects for having harbored bin Laden. The ISI is certainly wounded after the US raid and the loss of one of their probable wards. There were allegations, which remained out of investigative ambit of the 9/11 Commission, that the ISI had connived with the September 11 attackers.

It is entirely possible that the ISI will allow militant organizations in Pakistan orchestrate a future diabolic attack against the US, either at home or abroad. Mullah Omar and Ayman Al Zawahiri must have been tipped-off by their contacts inside the ISI to take extra caution for their safety. Unlike Osama, Mullah Omar's words still carry magical impact amongst the rank and file of the Taliban. The advantage with the Taliban is that unlike al-Qaeda they are fighting a known battle, to take power from foreign forces, and they have a concrete theatre of war, and hence they have strong backers and followers. Mullah Omar is a leader with a broad base of support, and a charismatic one as well.

If we look at the reality on the ground in Pakistan post the death of bin Laden, the picture looks murkier than before. Pakistan's political leadership may actually be regretting the death of bin Laden. Osama's fugitive status was bringing billions of US dollars to Pakistan.

Militants inside Pakistan may now punish the country for allowing the US to kill bin Laden. Within a few days of Osama's death al-Qaeda, the Afghan Taliban and the Pakistani Taliban pledged revenge. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistani (TTP) has gone a step further and announced that "President Zardari and the army will be our first targets. America will be our second target". There have been more than 20 militant attacks, killing almost 150 people, in Pakistani since the May 2 death of bin Laden. The most important was the May 22 attack in which TTP militants stormed the Mehran Naval air station in Karachi and destroyed a helicopter and two out of the Pakistan Navy's five P-3C Orion aircraft. US contractors – as well as a small number of Chinese engineers - were also at the base.

The army and ISI are divided in their strategic vision for Pakistan. The division is mostly between the upper-most strata, who traditionally support the Afghan Taliban and other militants, and the rank and file who bear the real brunt of the war on terror and are more opposed to such support. It is entirely possible that to deflect the attention of the world from its failure to reign in domestic militants and protect its sovereignty, the Pakistani military may orchestrate another border conflict with India or organize another Mumbai-like attack.

The Pakistani military and the ISI are now once again hurriedly re-invoking the old Indian bogey. By issuing statements like "misadventure of this kind (by India) will be responded to very strongly", the Pakistani military appears to be trying to raise the fear of India, a time-tested trick endeavored to reduce domestic tension.



What will happen to the US war on terror in the region? After the killing of bin Laden it may be construed that the US has attained its main objective in the war against terror, and that the Afghan Taliban leader Omar will now accept negotiations with the US in settling the future of Afghanistan. German newspaper *Del Spiegel* has already reported that although it is unknown where exactly in Germany the American and Afghan negotiators met, negotiations have already started. The talks are moderated by Michael Steiner, Germany's special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. On the American side, mid-ranking officials from the State Department and the CIA are reputedly taking part, and from the Afghan Taliban side Tayyab Agha, a 'relative' of Taliban leader Mullah Omar, is negotiating. Regional players like India, which has hitherto opposed any negotiation with the Taliban, have changed their stance and now appear to be more open to a negotiated settlement.

The killing of bin Laden has initiated a reassessment of the war in Afghanistan and the broader efforts to combat terrorism, with Congress, the military, and the Obama Administration weighing the goals, strategies, costs and underlying authority for a conflict that is now almost a decade old. President Obama declared his re-election bid at a time when he was almost certain that he would get bin Laden in the near future. Considering his re-election prospects Obama may remain intransigent on the issue of the withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan after July 2011. However, this withdrawal date is unlikely, and the US Administration has eased this somewhat by shifting its emphasis from the 2011 drawdown to a 2014 target for transition to Afghan-led security responsibility.

Yet, there is no reduction of Taliban ground force in Afghanistan. NATO spokeswoman Brig. Gen. Christine Whitecross said NATO's 2010-11 winter operations had sapped the Taliban. During that time NATO carried out 1,400 operations and killed or captured 500 insurgent leaders and 2,700 lower-level insurgents. The swelling number of Taliban fighters in Afghanistan, even after a decade of Taliban dethronement, is in stark contrast to the proposed outcomes of the US war on terrorism.

Still, after the discovery of bin Laden deep inside Pakistan, the voices of the US law makers are becoming increasingly acrimonious and shrill, in light of the view that billions of dollars granted to Pakistan have apparently yielded little or no results. The US effort to fight terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan has consistently been frustrated by the Pakistani military and intelligence services, as they have seemingly been playing both side of the conflict. Senior US officials acknowledge that the two countries have disagreed on how to fight al-Qaeda, Afghan Taliban fighters and other militants. However, as the dust after the bin Laden operation settles, the US will probably continue to grudgingly admit that working with Pakistan is an indispensable strategic necessity. Hillary Clinton rushed to Pakistan on May 27, to bridge the trust gap and called Pakistan "a good partner" in global efforts to fight terrorism.

The failure of the US-led global war on terrorism in Afghanistan could make the prognosis for Pakistan's longer-term stability much worse. Pakistan has been housing and promoting Kashmir-centric militant organizations like the Harkat-ul-Mujaheedin, Harkat-ul-Ansar, Hizbul-e-Mujaheedin and Jaish-e-Mohammed. The country is also dealing with sectarian militant organizations like the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Sepahi Sahiba-e-Pakistan. There are also other deadly transnational terrorist organizations in the country like the Lashkar-e-Taiba, TTP and al-Qaeda. As the country is home to a vast number of Pashtuns, the Afghan Taliban also has a strong foothold in the western parts of the state. Most importantly, the Taliban movement traces its genesis to Pakistan and hence the sympathy of Pakistani insurgents and Islamists for the Taliban is natural. All these groups presently, or at some point in the past, have either been regulated or funded by the ISI. Now the presence of such a plethora of extremist groups has become an increasing threat to the regime in Islamabad.

The condition in Afghanistan has a direct bearing on Pakistan and vice versa. By and large, Osama bin Laden was a symbol and his death, although it will have some impact, does not make much operational difference. Considering the huge popularity of bin Laden throughout the Islamic world and wealthy Islamic donors in particular, funding is the one issue in which al-Qaeda may be at a disadvantage after its symbolic leader's death. However, there is every possibility that other calibrated leaders of al-Qaeda may take Osama's place and remain able to generate money and recruits.

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The Death of Osama: The View from Australia

Clive Williams

The announcement by President Obama on 2 May 2011 (AEST) that the US had finally tracked down and killed Osama bin Laden and taken possession of his body gave Americans (and the families of the 10 Australian victims) some degree of closure for 9/11. It also brought an end to nearly 10 years of frustrating searching for the US's most wanted enemy.

President Obama noted that when he came to office he told Leon Panetta, the Director of CIA, to make the killing or capture of Osama bin Laden his top priority in the war against al-Qaeda.

President Obama said that in August 2010 there had been a possible lead concerning Osama bin Laden's whereabouts, and the information firmed over time. The information came not from Pakistan, but from identification and backtracking of a trusted al-Qaeda courier.

As we all know, the trail led to a compound at Abbottabad, north of Islamabad. The compound had unusually high security and was obviously built at some considerable expense - but had no phone or internet connections. Neighbors noted that the occupants burned their garbage and shunned contact with other residents. The CIA's assessment was that this could well be where Osama bin Laden was hiding out.

President Obama personally ordered a targeted operation against the compound by US Navy SEALs from the United States Naval Special Warfare Development Group (DEVGRU - formerly SEAL Team 6) of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), temporarily transferred to the control of the CIA. The DEVGRU SEALs operated in two teams of 12 each.

According to *The New York Times*, a total of "79 commandos and a dog" were involved in the raid. Additional personnel included "tactical signals, intelligence collectors, and navigators using highly-classified hyperspectral imagers." The SEALs flew into Pakistan from a staging base in Jalalabad, Afghanistan. The 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, an airborne unit of the US Army Special Operations Command, known as the Night Stalkers, provided two modified stealth Blackhawk helicopters, and two Chinooks as backups.

The raid on the compound occurred at around 0130 on 1 May (Pakistan time). It was made more complicated by the compound walls creating vortex effects, causing one of the Blackhawk helicopters to crash-land. Despite its destruction at the compound, there will undoubtedly be some loss of stealth technology to China.

The exact number and identity of the people living in the compound is uncertain. The occupants included Osama bin Laden, several members of his family, including three of his five wives (one being the fifth and youngest) and at least three children. A Pakistani official told *The New York Times* that nine children ranging from two to 12 years old were placed in Pakistani custody; seven may have belonged to the courier and his relative. One other person was reportedly taken away alive by the US military; CIA and White House officials have denied this.

Osama bin Laden, three other men, and a woman were reported killed during the operation. The deceased persons were said to be bin Laden's adult son (likely Hamza, some sources call him Khalid), the courier Abu Ahmed al-Kuwaiti, the courier's relative, and the courier's wife. Photographs showing the three dead men have been published by *Reuters*.

President Obama said he called President Zardari in Pakistan to share the news about the raid. All US reports indicate that no one in Pakistan was notified about the raid beforehand - which says a lot about the level of trust in the relationship. The political response so far in Pakistan has been subdued. The raid was a breach of Pakistan's sovereignty and there has, as expected, been an adverse public reaction in Pakistan. The Pakistan Government had always denied the presence of Osama bin Laden in their country, but there are suspicions that senior members of the Pakistan intelligence community must have known about Osama bin Laden's location. Either way, Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) was either complicit or incompetent - either is worrying.

From al-Qaeda's perspective it is much better for Osama to be a dead martyr than being held and humiliated in American custody. The Obama Administration may also have seen Osama dying at the compound as the preferred outcome. Osama alive at Guantanamo and acting as a rallying point or inspiration for Muslim extremists would have been an unattractive scenario. Osama in an American court gaining international Muslim sympathy for his sincerity and beliefs would have been another undesirable scenario.

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The crash of a modified stealth Blackhawk helicopter in Abbottabad will probably lead to some loss of US stealth technology to China

2

The discovery of Osama so close deep within Pakistan suggests that the ISI have been either complicit or incompetent

3

Dr Ayman al-Zawahiri is likely to succeed al-Qaeda's leader even though he is not as charismatic as bin Laden and could prove to be divisive



The downside of killing the unarmed Osama was that it was clearly not the “justice” claimed by President Obama. Osama bin Laden was never brought before a properly constituted court to hear evidence against him and be convicted as part of an acceptable legal process. This has caused concern internationally because we normally allow even the worst criminals to have their day in court. After the Second World War, the victorious allies went to great lengths to conduct war crimes trials. Due process was also later extended to Adolf Eichmann, Saddam Hussein and other politically motivated mass murderers. Not to do so is to lose the moral high ground.

Osama bin Laden’s successor is reported to be Saif al-Adel a former Egyptian Special Forces officer who had received training in the US. Dr Ayman al-Zawahiri was expected to take over, but the al-Qaeda ideologue was not as charismatic as bin Laden and may have been seen as a divisive leader. If Saif al-Adel is confirmed as the new leader, it could mean a new focus on al-Qaeda operational activity in the years ahead. Dr Zawahiri as leader would probably mean more promotion of ideology, than operational activity.

Al-Qaeda central is currently believed to consist of only perhaps 200 fighters and followers, mainly engaged in support and training activities in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Osama’s death is unlikely to make much of a difference to al-Qaeda international. In reality, the al-Qaeda “franchises” around the world, such as Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn (commonly known as al-Qaeda in Iraq), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), as well as other closely linked groups - like al-Shabab, are largely self-sufficient.

In recent times, Dr Ayman al-Zawahiri’s propaganda activities have been surpassed by those of Anwar al-Awlaki, the former American citizen, now based in Yemen. He is the spiritual leader of AQAP, and responsible for the English language *Inspire* magazine, and for encouraging some of the recent attacks on US passenger and cargo aircraft. In the past three years, his English language sermons and articles have been influencing more young Muslims in the West than the announcements of al-Zawahiri or bin Laden. Anwar al-Awlaki’s potent influence has been seen in several of the home-grown lone-wolf attacks over the past two years.

Claims by some experts that we should now be expecting terrorist revenge attacks in the West are not convincing, at least in the short term. There has been an angry reaction to Osama bin Laden’s death in places like Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen, but in most Western countries, such as Australia, revenge attacks would take months to organize. The West’s security intelligence is much better than it was at the time of 9/11, and has resulted in most terrorist plots being thwarted. For instance, there have been no terrorist attacks in Australia since 9/11 – with 38 persons arrested for terrorism-related offences - and 23 convicted.

Osama bin Laden was clearly living on borrowed time since 9/11, and his successful assassination at a time when the United States is doing it tough economically is a great morale boost for President Obama and the American people. President Obama’s new approval rating could possibly see him re-elected. One joke doing the rounds is that the Republicans are so impressed with President Obama’s counterterrorism success that they are thinking of granting him full American citizenship.

The successful raid underlines that no terrorist leader is unreachable – even if it does take time. What it also demonstrates is that there is always someone else ready to step up and take the place of a fallen leader. However long term resolution to the problems posed by terrorism is more likely to be achieved by political outcomes than targeted assassinations.

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Moist Insurgencies in India and the Philippines: A Comparison

Amparo Pamela H. Fabe

The parallel Maoist insurgencies in India and the Philippines have been gaining strength due to the ideological attractiveness of communism among the farmers, workers and members of some marginalized groups. The high poverty indices of these two countries remain persistent even at a time when the onset of rapid industrialization and globalization has introduced new job possibilities and new organizational structures in businesses. In addition, the continued resilience of the Maoist communist movements stems in part from their accessibility to funding and tactical support from sympathetic external groups.

It was an idealist named Kanu Sanyal who spearheaded the Naxalbari uprising in 1967 which led to the establishment of a Maoist movement that now threatens the Indian state. Sanyal helped found the Communist Party of India-Marxist Leninist (CPI-ML), whose adherents came to be dubbed Naxalites, or 'Naxalbaris', after the name of the village where the first uprising occurred. The CPI-ML was born after a crippling split in the Communist Party of India-Marxists (CPI-M). This split unleashed violence across India that left many casualties among Maoists, security personnel and civilians. From their humble beginnings the Naxalbaris have spread Maoist ideology, helped in part by the brutal actions of Indian government forces in tribal areas. In 2003, the Naxalbaris were present in 55 districts and 9 states. By 2008, the Naxalbaris were operating in 220 districts in 22 states. Thus, the people's war has spread throughout much of north, central and east India to the degree that the state now considers the Naxalbaris as a grave threat to Indian internal security.

The main legacy of the Naxalbari movement is that it has reintroduced into Indian politics the question of armed struggle for the seizure of power. From 1951 to 1967, the question of armed struggle was not included in the purview of Indian politics. The Naxalbaris gained significance because for the first time it has challenged the political-economic system as it has existed since 1951.

The Naxalbari movement also raises the question of the overthrow of a semi-colonial, semi-feudal system of land management in order to ensure genuine development. The Naxalbaris have made this issue an important agenda in Indian state and federal politics. The status of India as a semi-feudal society is central to the agrarian struggle of the Naxalbaris, where issues of land, the distribution of landlord's holdings, and the necessity of overthrowing their political power and the redistribution of land ownership are all related issues.

The Naxalbaris in the state of Bengal, for instance, aim to put an end to the sharecropping system, so that land can be owned and managed by the peasants. It is claimed that until the Naxalbaris can overthrow the political power of landlords it will not be possible for the peasants to seize or hold the land on which they have toiled for generations.

A similar argument has been put forward by the ideologues of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) since the 1950s. The Communist Party of the Philippines had an initial contact with the Naxalbaris in early 1989. The Naxalbaris were supported and encouraged by the Filipino CPP members who helped them launch the "people's war".

The Naxalbaris and the CPP members share the same goal and five common characteristics. The highest goal of both revolutionary groups is the overthrow of the existing political system and social conditions through an agrarian revolution – the uprising of poor peasants who inhabit the Philippine and Indian countryside. These two groups also share six closely linked features:

First, both revolutionary groups are inspired by Maoist writings. Selections of Mao's writings are known by heart by each and every Filipino and Indian comrade.

Second, these groups are experts in the handling of ordinance and explosives and the setting up of landmines. These groups also have the capacity to render precise bombing tactics that can negatively affect government counter-insurgency efforts. In West Bengal, for example, a landmine exploded in 2008 prior to the uprising of the *adivasis* (tribal peoples) in an area developed by Jintal Steel.

Third, both revolutionary groups derive their primary income from various criminal activities such as business extortion and weapons smuggling. According to the Armed Forces of the Philippines, the CPP generated US\$ 20 million in revenues for the 'permit to campaign' fees from the political candidates of the 2010 Presidential elections in the Philippines.

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The Naxalite movement has spread throughout much of central and east India and is now considered a grave threat to the State's internal security

2

The goal of both the Naxalbaris and the Communist Party of the Philippines is the overthrow of existing political and social conditions through a popular peasant revolution

3

Foreign powers may be providing covert ideological support and shipments of arms to both these groups



Moreover, the CPP is able to collect millions of pesos as 'revolutionary tax' for foreign businesses operating in CPP controlled areas. In Southern Luzon alone, the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army (CPP-NPA) collected 36 million pesos in 'revolutionary taxes' in 2010, up by 11 million pesos from 2009.

Fourth, both groups maintain a Party Central Committee, a political bureau and a military wing. The political (*Politi*) bureau of the Naxalbaris is the international liaison officer who is in charge of the international fund-raising from known communist sympathizers. The political bureau of the CPP-NPA is handled by the Communist Internationale section. The military wing of the Naxalbaris is in charge of the recruitment, selection and training of young comrades for the military campaign. The CPP-NPA conducts training operations for young cadres in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.

Fifth, both groups place a heavy emphasis on continuous political training as part of the genuine parliamentary struggle that is part and parcel of the 'people's war'. A proof of this effective strategy is the election into office of many CPP-NPA members in the Philippine House of Representatives for 2010. In the case of India, the political fortunes of the Naxalbaris had been less successful, as they were decimated in the 2010 polls. However, there is a possibility that the Naxalbaris of West Bengal may gain political power in the next elections through their continued efforts in obtaining tremendous grassroots support from the *adivasi* tribal peoples.

Sixth, the communist cadres in both movements share a strong faith, hope and love for the Communist Party. The personal dedication of the individual cadres and their close-knit fraternal relationships are part of what makes them formidable as a group. The two groups share a similar flag (the hammer and sickle of the Maoist Party), military training and formation, ordinance (landmine) and weapons training and the practice of guerilla style warfare. The two groups also share a similar strategy with respect to the indigenous tribal people. In the Philippines, the CPP leaders and committed members are active in the activities and training related to the empowerment of the indigenous peoples of all tribal groups. In West Bengal, the Naxalbaris gained a political and popular support from the *adivasi* peoples.

This is part of an overall systematic strategy, indicative of local communist movements, of ensuring a permanent presence in marginalized political groups. Moreover, the female members of these groups are among the most highly trained and aggressive soldiers who are tasked to commence guerilla attacks on military forces.

The connections between the Philippine and Indian Maoists are more than simply thematic, but also extend to operational support. Filipino CPP-NPA members were instrumental in the establishment of a form of sustainable Maoist indoctrination among the Naxalbaris. For instance, some Filipino CPP-NPA members in India conceptualized and organized the Young Communists Mobile School movement which teaches basic communist principles to groups of Indian children. This early engagement with children, and their indoctrination, is essential in propagating communist ideology and keeping its spirit alive among the younger members of the marginalized tribal and caste groups throughout India.

Furthermore, the dramatic rise of China as an economic and political superpower in the Asian region may be leading to the increased growth and strength of the Naxalbaris and the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army. It is possible that there are groups within China who may be sympathetic to these Maoist insurgencies, as these insurgencies help disseminate Maoist ideology to a politically conscious and committed agrarian populace. The Naxalbaris along the West Bengal coast has been able to receive regular shipment of arms from undisclosed donors from abroad. The CPP-NPA rebels also receive a steady supply of weapons and ammunitions that are smuggled illegally along the coastline areas.

However, the role of role of foreign support for these groups is far from clear. China adroitly maintains warm and cordial relations with these two countries. Diplomatically, China has always taken a positive stance towards the Indian state as it tries to nurture mutually advantageous state-to-state relations. China has been successful in maintaining closer diplomatic and economic relations with the Philippines as well.

Nevertheless, the continued inability of the Philippine and Indian governments to eliminate these groups constitutes a continuing strategic threat to their respective internal security.



The Controversial Dismissal of Professor Yunus in Bangladesh

Moinul Khan

The removal of Nobel Peace Laureate Professor Yunus from the Grameen Bank by order of the Awami-led Bangladesh Government has sparked an intense debate both within and beyond the country. Generally viewed, this order is primarily understood as having been a political move. Professor Yunus (who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 for initiating micro-credit schemes for the masses of rural poor, particularly women) was considered a lightning rod for likely political opposition to the Government's power base. The Government order has at one-stroke both removed his power base as a potential political threat while at the same time bringing the bank's eight million beneficiaries under direct Government influence. This has created an issue of import beyond the immediate political context, having implications for the future of poverty alleviation and women empowerment in a Muslim majority country.

The removal order came following Norwegian television releasing a documentary covering a dispute within the Grameen Bank that was settled in the nineties. The Government position on this removal issue was that Professor Yunus is over 60 years old (now 70) and violates the bank's compulsory retirement at 60 rule. The ruling party also put forward a charge against him that he was "sucking blood from the poor" by charging high interest rate and treating the people of Bangladesh as "guinea pigs". An allegation of misuse of the bank's money was also brought against him, but remains unproven.

Professor Yunus' lawyers have claimed that the age bar is not applicable as the Board of Directors, the highest decision-making body of the bank, has waived this bar in the case of the appointment of Managing Director. Although Professor Yunus has taken his case to the Supreme Court, his appeal has been rejected both in the High Court Division and the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, without either issuing any cause for the dismissal. The Government's order and the judicial ruling on this issue have attracted strong reactions from supporters throughout Bangladesh and the world in both local and international media.

The Government order has been viewed by many as a politically motivated move. Had it been simply an issue of age bar, then why did the Government not take action ten years ago when he turned 60? There are currently three possible alternate explanations as to why he has been removed from the Grameen Bank.

First, the present Awami League-led Government considers Professor Yunus as a formidable challenge to their party's power base. The Nobel Laureate expressed his political interest in 2007 and floated a political party, but withdrew himself from the venture. He was also given an offer by the sponsors of the caretaker Government (2006-2008) for the position of the Chief Adviser. However, he refused but recommended his fellow economist Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed for the position and continued to give his full blessing to the army-backed caretaker Government. During this time, many politicians, including those from the present Awami League, faced charges of corruption.

Second, the Government may deem that the control of the bank and its over eight million beneficiaries will give it a needed edge in the upcoming elections.

Third, the removal order is interpreted by some as an act of sheer personal malice. According to columnist Dr. Jafar Iqbal, publishing in the daily *Prothom Alo* on March 7, 2011, in the 1970s and 1980s Bangladesh's name became synonymous with Awami League leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. But later Dr. Yunus earned equal global respect and notoriety, which may not be entirely palatable to the current ruling party. It is possible that the public celebrity of the Nobel Prize Laureate annoyed the ruling party boss Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at a time when she was attempting to win the same Nobel Prize by concluding a peace treaty with feuding groups on the troubled hill districts in the country.

According to supporters of Professor Yunus, the rejection of his lawful appeal undermined the independence of the judiciary and simply reflected the wishes of the ruling party. Their arguments are mainly based upon three counts.

First, Professor Yunus was not given the opportunity to be heard before the removal order, which is inconsistent with the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution.

1 The dismissal of Professor Yunus has removed him as a potential political threat and brought the bank's eight million beneficiaries under direct government influence

2 The rejection of Professor Yunus' lawful appeal has undermined the independence of the judiciary in Bangladesh

3 The removal will likely be a setback for the Grameen Bank's micro-credit schemes which have been instrumental in emancipating rural women and discouraging Islamic radicalization



Second, the approval of the Board of Directors of Grameen Bank was submitted to the Government ten years ago and during this long period there was no objection raised from the Government, indicating its tacit consent to the Board's decision. The sudden removal order after such a long period is suspicious.

Third, the Government's order was followed by a series of statements and agitations by its leaders against the Professor. On one occasion, the Prime Minister herself called him a "blood sucker" and her party men instigated prosecutions and public processions against him. The media in Bangladesh has claimed that this clearly reflects an unkind attitude not backed up by any proof.

The removal order has met a sharp reaction from the international community. The United States expressed its displeasure by saying it was "deeply troubled" and told the press that it would affect the bilateral relations between the two countries. The media also reported that US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also made a phone call to the Bangladeshi Prime Minister on this issue. France also reacted to the Government's move with displeasure.

Despite some criticism of the economic results generated by the Grameen Bank, Professor Yunus won the Nobel Peace Prize for his contribution to the alleviation of poverty, particularly among rural women. His system of micro-credit loans is now followed in about 50 countries, including the United States and many across Africa and Asia. Incredibly, he started the initiative by lending only US\$ 27 (taken from his own pocket) in the 1980s and the loan system has since spread, with over one billion US dollars in loans and savings and about eight million people as beneficiaries in Bangladesh. The main concept of this initiative is that the credit is lent to the poor who have no collateral and have no access to loans from the commercial banks. With an innovative management, such micro-credit has helped these people to set up enterprises and small businesses in local areas, opening up employment opportunities and income generation in marginalized communities. The success of this initiative is best illustrated by its very effective rate of loan recovery, which is currently at about 97 per cent.

Another prominent and important aspect of the Grameen Bank's micro-credit system is that most of the beneficiaries are women who can now earn a living through manufacturing, trade and doing businesses side by side with men. This micro-credit has brought these women out of their homes and into the workforce empowering them both economically and socially. This initiative and its results, particularly with regard to the women, are critical to strengthening a secular society in which Muslims constitute about 88 per cent of the population.

The Government's removal of Professor Yunus has also raised debate around the question of the independence of the Bangladeshi judiciary. According to the *Economist* (April 5, 2011), the rejection of the appeal of the Nobel laureate will "deepen international concerns" about the integrity of the judicial system in Bangladesh to act independently on critical issues where vital interests are concerned. However, such an incident occurring due to political and personal matters is not uncommon in countries where the appointment, promotion and placement of judges are in the control of the State, as was manifested in the case of Anwar Ibrahim in Malaysia in 2008.

The future of Grameen Bank without Professor Yunus is now an open question. His removal will most likely result in a big setback for the Grameen Bank and its poverty alleviation process. Can its eight million beneficiaries, mostly women, continue with their efforts to fight poverty in such a politicized and contested environment? According to some analysts, poverty alleviation, particularly in rural areas, may be heading towards a more uncertain future; as may be the role of emancipated women in the workforce.

There is a danger that both democracy and secular society are slowly being eroded in Bangladesh. The beneficiaries, mostly women, of the Grameen Bank and their family members (who number in the tens of millions) are on the whole opposed to fundamentalist and interpretations of Islam, and to radicalism. They are often seen as an inherent resistance to the growth of such trends, a 'silent' working class which strengthens secular and democratic society in the country.

If the Grameen Bank scheme suffers because of cynical Government interference, it is possible that the conservative social agenda of Islamist groups is likely to penetrate more deeply into the society, and this could have dismal implications for the country. ●

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