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Militants open a new front in Pakistan

By Syed Saleem Shahzad
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KARACHI - On March 25, United States intelligence, despite detailed briefing by Pakistan, missed the chance to take out Pakistani Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud, one of the world's most wanted men with a US State Department bounty of US\$5 million on his head.

This failure, some arrested men linked to Mehsud's banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) [network](#) have revealed, has set the scene for renewed unrest across the country, starting in the port city of Karachi.

Based on specific information they had handed over, senior officials in Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence in Islamabad were confident of receiving a good-news call from their American friends concerning an attack on Mehsud's sanctuary. They got the call, saying that a target had been hit and eight al-Qaeda militants killed. The Predator drone strike was in Makeen in the South Waziristan tribal area, the headquarters of Mehsud, but crucially it left his compound unharmed.

The attack angered Mehsud, a senior jihadi leader told Asia Times Online on condition of anonymity, and he has vowed revenge. "The attack has left him like a wounded lion in the jungle, and everything and anything could be his prey," the jihadi said.

"However, in Mehsud's case, his anger will be vented only against Pakistan. The reason is very technical. Three large Pakistani tribal-based networks are in the region of North Waziristan and South Waziristan. These include the network of Sirajuddin Haqqani, based in Dande Darpa Khail. This includes 22 powerful *jehbas* [groups]. The region borders Ghulam Khan, which goes into the Afghan province of Khost. This network is very influential and useful for attacks on NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] troops in Khost, Paktia and Ghazni.

"The second network," the jihadi continued, "is run by Mullah Nazeer and is based in the South Waziristan region of the Wazir tribes near Angor Ada and Shakai, which borders with

Paktika. Nazeer runs the largest jihadi network in Paktika and is the main source of attacks on NATO troops. Neither Nazeer nor Siraj [Haqqani] is any threat to Pakistan, therefore NATO constantly attacks their positions and demands that Pakistan also take action against them.

"In this whole game, the strangest situation is that of Baitullah Mehsud. He is based in Makeen, which is disconnected from the border region and is near areas close to the Pakistani [security](#) forces. That's why Pakistan is always interested in getting ceasefire agreements with Mehsud's network, which is numerically the largest among all [militant groups], to protect its troops.

"Any American adventurism in Mehsud's area provokes Mehsud. Mehsud does not have any direct access to Afghan provinces, so he vents his reactions on Pakistani troops, blaming them as co-conspirators against him," the jihadi leader said.

Mehsud's activities have mostly been restricted to North-West Frontier Province, apart from sporadic attacks in Islamabad and its twin city, Rawalpindi. However, after the recent [developments](#), including the first attack on his area, the Mehsud network and other al-Qaeda linked groups plan "real fireworks" all over the country, according to people linked to his network who were arrested in Karachi.

[A national-security threat](#)

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID), in [collaboration](#) with an intelligence agency, disclosed on Monday that it had arrested a close aide of Mehsud - 59-year-old Badshah Deen Mehsud, son of Gul Khadeen Mehsud, a resident of Shah Noorani Goth, Karachi and South Waziristan.

Badshah, who speaks Urdu and Pashto, is affiliated with Mehsud's TTP and is a close aide of Mehsud. One of his sons, Mehrban, also works for the TTP.

The CID's Fayyaz Khan claimed at a press briefing that Badshah provided logistical [support](#) to Mehsud and was allegedly involved in crimes ranging from robbing money changers and banks to providing vehicles and shelter to those working for the TTP in Karachi. He is also said to have provided medical treatment to injured associates.

Senior investigators have told Asia Times Online that the situation in Karachi is very delicate and law-enforcement agencies had decided to avoid any direct clashes with militants. That is, there was a tacit agreement that the militants could use Karachi to raise funds and for other logistic purposes, and the security agencies would not carry out any [operations](#) against their sanctuaries.

Most of the fund-raising was to provide support for the Taliban in Afghanistan - a source of anger for the US. This concern was translated to a Karachi-based political party, the Muttehida Quami Movement (MQM), which recently began a campaign against the Taliban in the city.

This included an incident in which the MQM blew the whistle on a kidnapping operation in Karachi by the Mehsud tribe in which several police officers were injured. This forced the police to take action, leading to several arrests, including the high-profile one announced on Monday.

With the "truce" with the security forces having been broken, Mehsud and his allied groups now want to strike back, starting by creating chaos in Karachi. They have chosen the city for two reasons:

- ☐ It has the largest concentration of the Mehsud tribe after South Waziristan.
- ☐ It has a non-Pashtun majority, making it ripe for ethnic violence with the second-largest community, the Pashtuns.

In this battle, Asia Times Online has learned, the militants are searching for ways to unnerve their enemies in top positions, including high-profile kidnappings in the country's largest city and financial center.

The battles of the tribal areas have now unmistakably moved to the urban centers.