



## A Talk with the "Taliban-Maker", Former Pakistani ISI Chief Hamid Gul *Sunday 26 April 2009*

**By Mohammed Al Shafey in London**

[Asharq Al-Awsat] What are the sides participating in the fighting in the Pakistani tribal region? Would you give us an idea about those that bore arms against the Pakistani army?

[Gul] There are two categories of fighters in the tribal region. The first category consists of those that are fighting to avenge what took place in Pakistan following the 11 September 2001 attacks, especially those that are fighting to avenge what happened during the military operation that was carried out in the Red Mosque or the Lal Masjid. But these are not currently active after the new government took over power in Islamabad. This issue could be settled if we had an independent judicial authority in Pakistan that would investigate the killing that took place in the Red Mosque. These citizens continue to carry out acts of vengeance in some places. The second category consists of the criminal elements that fled from the Pakistani cities and found refuge in the tribal region. For example, one armed sectarian organization that was pursued in the Pakistani cities has fled and found refuge in the tribal region. The mujahidin know that these are criminal elements and do not provide them with any support. At the same time, however, they do not wish to open two fronts at the same time and thus they do not wish to fight them. Third, the US intelligence service has established more than 50 units in the Pakistani tribal region. These units are backed by the Indian intelligence services. These recruit the locals and foreign elements in the tribal region. Fourth, there are the mujahidin who wish to leave Pakistan and fight. But when the Pakistani army launched operations against them, they had no choice but to fight the Pakistani army. And this is what the Americans want. They want to see these mujahidin fighting against the Pakistani army and not crossing the borders to fight the Americans and the international forces.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] How did the Pakistani intelligence services help in establishing the Taliban movement? Is it paying the price at present?

[Gul] We helped the Taliban at first but we ended the training in 1989 and everything came to a stop. Most of the members of the Taliban movement were Afghan veterans that were trained during the Afghan war. We did not train anyone after 1989. So this training stopped about 20 years ago. Naturally, those that we trained have become older. So you give the wrong impression when you say that they are the same citizens that we trained.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] But is the support network that you established for the Afghan jihad active now in fighting against the Pakistani army?

[Gul] No, it is not the same network but the same spirit of jihad dominates the scene. There is no network. Only look at the scene in the tribal region. There is no network there. Each tribe is fighting in its region and no tribe crosses to the region of the other tribe. Each tribe has its command structure. At present, they have formed the "Tehrik-e Pakistan Taliban" (The Pakistani Taliban Movement) but it does not control all the Taliban groups in the tribal region.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] How and from where did the Pakistani Taliban Movement obtain their resources, such as arms and funds?

[Gul] The Americans are supplying them with arms and equipment. This is a unique

characteristic of the tribal region. They are prepared to accept arms from any source. During the period of the Afghan jihad, the Russians gave them arms to fight against the Pakistani army. The citizens in these regions accepted money and arms from the Russians but they did not fight against the Pakistani army as the Russians wanted. Now there is a difference. They are accepting arms and money from the Americans and also fighting the Pakistani army. Why this difference? It is very simple: The Pakistani army is killing them and conducting major operations against them.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you think that the Pakistani army generals are turning a blind eye to Al-Qaeda and the Taliban that cross the border to fight the international forces in Afghanistan?

[Gul] They are indeed crossing the border and entering Afghanistan, but this is not confined only to the residents of the tribal region. Let me tell you that citizens from Punjab are going and fighting in Afghanistan.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you totally reject the idea that the Pakistani intelligence service has connections to the Taliban movement?

[Gul] No, let me tell you what kind of connections. I am a retired official but the al-Qaeda Afghan elements - Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, Karzai, and others - are against Pakistan but they are my friends. As far as I am concerned, they are old friends. So there are social relations. But it is not true at all to say that Pakistani intelligence officials are now supporting the Taliban movement and that this is their policy. This is incorrect.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] A report published in The New York Times has said that Jalaluddin Haqqani, a commander in the Taliban movement, is backed by the Pakistani intelligence services. Is this true?

[Gul] Jalalludin Haqqani is a personal friend of mine. When I sent my two sons to Afghanistan to wage jihad against the Soviet forces they fought alongside Jalalludin Haqqani's men. He is a very, very good man. However, this does not mean that I am in a position now to give him support. His family has been in Pakistan for 30 years. There are 2.5 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan and they will continue to come and go from and to Afghanistan.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] You mentioned having social relations with Afghan leaders and Taliban commanders. Did you ever meet Ayman al-Zawahiri or Mullah Omar or Osama Bin Laden?

[Gul] Let me make one point clear: During the Afghan jihad the Pakistani intelligence services trained Afghans only; we did not train non-Afghans. We received people for training through Afghan sides; no one came to us directly. We made sure that they were all Afghans. The Arabs and other nationalities had their private camps in Afghanistan. Osama Bin Laden was never in contact with us. The first time I met Osama Bin Laden was in Sudan after I retired. We used to hear from the Americans that Osama Bin Laden is a great warrior but we had no direct contact with him or with Abdullah Azzam (Osama Bin Laden's spiritual guide during the Afghan jihad; he is Palestinian). We did not train anyone except Afghans.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] In your opinion, what are the goals for which the Taliban movement is fighting in Afghanistan and its goals for fighting in Pakistan?

[Gul] There are two goals and they are clear and simple. The first goal is to fight for freedom and the second is to apply Shariaa. When they were in power in Afghanistan, they applied Shariaa there and made gains. It is also true that they made many mistakes; they were young and had no experience in management. But in general, the resulting government was good. They established a central authority in Afghanistan and women were given their inheritance rights for the first time in the

history of Afghan society. There were excesses, such as forcing women in the Afghan towns to put on the Burqu and men to grow beards. But they established the rule of law and order in the country and provided protection to the Afghan citizens. So the Taliban movement wants to apply Shariaa as an alternative system in Afghanistan.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] On one hand you say that the Americans are supplying the Taliban with arms and on another hand you say that the Americans oppose the Taliban movement.

[Gul] Yes, they are doing all those things. They are executing their plans. They want the national Pakistani youths to fight against the Pakistani army and they have succeeded in this.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Are there any contacts between the Pakistani intelligence services and the Taliban movement at present?

[Gul] No, there may be social relations as I just told you. Many Afghans come to meet me and I never ask them whether they are Taliban or which side they follow.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] But don't you have official contacts with the Taliban?

[Gul] The Taliban surfaced as a movement three years ago after it became independent from the Pakistani intelligence services. It had a relationship with the Afghan mujahidin. The Taliban movement as an organization appeared later.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Is it possible that some neighboring countries, like Iran and Pakistan, are helping them?

[Gul] This is not true; it is mere propaganda to turn Arab public opinion against Iran. Iran is involved in Khoram [place name as transliterated], close to the Afghan border, where there are sectarian clashes. But let me tell you that the Americans are involved in the sectarian clashes in Pakistan.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you think that some Al-Qaeda leaders are now present in Iran?

[Gul] You know that after the Al-Qaeda dispersed in Afghanistan following the US attack there, many of them were arrested in Pakistan and some of them were killed. After that, they turned to Iran and the Iranian government did not arrest any of them. Some of them were put in prison but they were later released. This is very suspicious. The Americans did not say a word regarding this. Osama Bin Laden has three wives and about 18 children. Where did they all go? They all fled via Iran.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you think that the Taliban will regain power in Afghanistan once again? If so, what is the timeframe?

[Gul] I am not saying that the Taliban will regain Afghanistan. But I am certain that the freedom-loving Afghan citizens will soon be in power in Afghanistan.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] When will this happen? What is the timeframe that you expect for this to happen?

[Gul] Not more than two years. I think the United States will have to leave Afghanistan.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] How long do you think the Americans will remain in Afghanistan?

[Gul] If the Americans are wise, they will leave Afghanistan within one year. If they are not wise, Pakistan will witness a revolution as a result of the US presence in Afghanistan. They will be defeated in Afghanistan and they will have to leave Afghanistan in 2010 or 2011.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you think that Al-Qaeda has or has tried to procure weapons of mass destruction?

[Gul] This is sheer US propaganda because it wants to destroy Pakistan's nuclear power. The Pakistani nuclear program is the main goal of the Americans.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Who is in charge of the Pakistani nuclear arsenal? Is it under the

command of the army or the president?

[Gul] In principle, these are elastic arrangements. The nuclear arsenal was under the command of the army in the days of former President General Zia-ul-Haq. After that, the nuclear command body was formed and a very detailed structure was put in place to control the nuclear weapons. In practice, the arsenal is under the control of the Pakistani president. The problem is that former President Musharraf changed the political system into a presidential system although we are a parliamentary system. Thus, the responsibility of protecting the Pakistani nuclear program is in the hands of President Asif Ali Zardari.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] When former President Pervez Musharraf was in power, we used to hear that his life was in danger because Al-Qaeda wants to kill him. Do you think that Al-Qaeda is threatening Zardari?

[Gul] This depends on Asif Ali Zardari's behavior. So far, he has not done anything to provoke such a threat except the military operation in the tribal Bajwar regions under pressure from the Americans. But so far, Zardari has not reached the point where his life may be a target for Al-Qaeda.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] How do you spend your time since you retired from your post?

[Gul] I lecture in some universities and other educational institutions. I keep in touch with the media, I tour Pakistan, and I address various gatherings of Pakistanis.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you feel threatened? Do you need or do you have private bodyguards to protect you?

[Gul] Some come to me and say I need some kind of protection. But I put my faith in God. Second, the area where I live is well protected but I put my faith in God.

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