

# **Terrorism and Transnational Groups in Pakistan: A Case Study of Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan**

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## **Abstract**

*Pakistan has severely been affected by extremism and terrorism for a couple of decades. Much of this terrorism is an outcome of transnational terrorist groups, which are harbouring mostly in Afghanistan and Pakistan. 9/11 and the consequent global war on terrorism has put Pakistan at the forefront of global anti-terrorism efforts. In Afghanistan, the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) forced some of the transnational Islamists groups, including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU,) to take sanctuary in the Federally Administered Tribal Region (FATA) of Pakistan. In order to survive in a 'foreign' territory, the IMU joined its hands with local terrorist organisation, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). It carried out terrorists' activities throughout Pakistan on the directives of TTP in exchange of sanctuary and finances. Nevertheless, it attacked some of the strategically most important targets in Pakistan. As a result of operation Zarb-e-Azb, the IMU has left Pakistan and is currently, stationed in Northern Afghanistan. Set in this context, the article would try to discuss the background, operational capabilities and activities of the IMU in Central Asia and particularly in Pakistan. It will also try to address the questions; what are the objectives of the IMU? What kind of terrorist activities it has conducted in Pakistan? And why has it been stationed in Pakistan? The research is historical, interpretive and analytical in nature. Both primary and secondary sources have been utilised to carry out this research.*

**Keywords:** Terrorism, Transnational Groups, Pakistan, Central Asia, IMU.

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## Introduction

The mission of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) had remained to overthrow the 'authoritarian' regime of the Uzbek President, Islam Karimov, and replace it with an Islamic one. It claims to establish an Islamic caliphate in the region. Interestingly, however, the IMU has never been based in Uzbek territory but remained active in Tajik, Afghan, Pakistani, Syrian and Iraqi territories, since its inception, in 1998, in Afghanistan. It had fought against Emomali Rehmanov regime of Tajikistan alongside the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), an alliance of secular and religious opposition parties in Tajikistan during the Tajik civil war of 1992-1997. The 'Fall of Kabul' to the Taliban and 'General Peace Accord' between the government and the UTO in Tajikistan in 1997, forced the IMU to migrate to Afghanistan.

One of the leaders of the IMU, Tahir Yuldashev, had been very close to al-Qaeda and its leader, Osama bin Laden. It was the latter who encouraged Yuldashev to pursue Juma Namanagani (leader of the IMU) to move to Afghanistan along with his fighters. During Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Namanagani was killed in an air strike by the US forces. The remnants of the IMU, under Yuldashev's leadership, moved to the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA) region of Pakistan. The IMU remained in Pakistan till June 2014, when Operation *Zarb-e-Azb* was launched by Pakistan's military against militants in North Waziristan. Currently, the IMU is based in Afghanistan: some of its members have joined the Islamic State (IS) and are fighting in Syria and Iraq. It is said that the current *Amir* (leader), Usman Ghazi, is a pragmatic person and wants to keep multiple doors open for the IMU. On the one hand, he has stated to support IS and, on the other hand, he keeps supporting Afghan Taliban and Mullah Omar. He also maintains its relations with al-Qaeda.

This research is focused on origin, ideology, mission, operational capabilities, transnational linkages and the involvement of the IMU in terrorism, in Pakistan. The research is qualitative in nature and relies upon explanatory and interpretive methods. This research tries to answer the question 'why' while keeping in mind the contemporary domestic, regional and extra-regional realities. This research also analyses the future of the IMU in Pakistan.

## Background

The IMU, along with other international Islamist militant organisations, took refuge in FATA after OEF in 2001. Some of the IMU members were Pakistani while several others (non-Pakistani) had close relationships in FATA, whereas a few intermarried in the region. They had a historical relationship with the locals due to Afghan ‘Jihad’ of the 1980s, where so-called Mujahedin and tribal people fought against the ‘evil’ power alongside each other.<sup>1</sup> Such circumstances were very much conducive for the IMU to live peacefully in South Waziristan. The areas where the IMU settled in Pakistan included Wana, Azam Warsak, Sheen Warsak and Kaloosha.

When the IMU tried to influence locals into following its orders, tension arose and led to a clash between the IMU militants and the local tribesmen in 2004. At the same time, Pakistan Army launched an offensive against militants in the area. This military offensive was a real setback for the IMU and brought the militant organisation and Pakistan’s military into direct confrontation. Since the IMU and al-Qaeda were close to each other, the former had no financial problems as al-Qaeda was supporting the latter in return for trained fighters. The IMU was successful in its efforts to station itself in the South Waziristan. The government and local elders were trying hard to push the IMU out of FATA. With the help of Mullah Nazir, a powerful local tribal chief, Pakistan Army was successful in pushing the IMU outside the South Waziristan and into the harsh mountainous terrain of North Waziristan.<sup>2</sup>

When Baitullah Mehsud founded Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in 2007, the IMU saw it as a strategic necessity to ally itself with TTP for the sake of survival in the tribal region. This alliance with TTP not only provided shelter to the IMU in Waziristan but also presented an opportunity to carry out some of the most lethal terrorist activities against the Pakistani security forces. In order to win the confidence of Baitullah Mehsud, the

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Saud, “Death of Islam Karimov and Future of Islamism in Central Asia: Case Study of IMU,” *Central Asia Journal*, no. 77 (Winter 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Hans-Inge Longo, “Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan: Crackdowns (2005-2010),” in Adam Saud, “Political Islam in Central Asia: Post Independence revivalism (1992-2004),” *PhD Thesis*, School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, 129.

IMU remained engaged in kidnapping for ransom and extortion activities as well. It also carried out attacks on the Pakistani airports.<sup>3</sup>

## Objectives of IMU

The IMU was established in 1998 in Northern Afghanistan with the help of al-Qaeda. The major goal of this organisation was to overthrow the ‘un-Islamic’ regime of Islam Karimov and replace it with “...an Islamic state under Sharia Law.”<sup>4</sup> Tahir Yuldashev declared that it was the need of time to establish an Islamic state on the pattern of the early state of Madina established by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He said that the social evils like, “bribery, injustice, oppression and inequalities” are the major curse to our society and we need to get rid of them.<sup>5</sup> Yuldashev also stated that “the goals of the IMU activities are firstly fighting against oppression within our country, against bribery, against the inequities and also the freeing of our Muslim brothers from prison.... Who will avenge those Muslims who have died in the prisons? Of course, we will. We consider it our obligation to avenge them... We do not repent our declaration of jihad against the Uzbek government.”<sup>6</sup>

The IMU wanted to penetrate the broader Central and South Asian region with the help of international jihadi organisations. Yuldashev stated that “we are with Shiekh Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda... after taking over Afghanistan and Pakistan (with the help of international jihadis based in these states), one part of us will go to India and the other will go to the Central Asian states.”<sup>7</sup> The death of two founding and charismatic leaders of the IMU – Juma Namangani and Tahir Yuldashev – placed a dent in the

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<sup>3</sup> Shakir Saadi, “ISIL Propaganda Suffers Fiasco in Central Asia,” April 20, 2011, [www.cewntralasiaonline.com/en\\_GB/articles/caii/features/main/20/04/11/06/feature-01](http://www.cewntralasiaonline.com/en_GB/articles/caii/features/main/20/04/11/06/feature-01)

<sup>4</sup> [www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dpiD=cQe-m](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dpiD=cQe-m), in Saud, “Political Islam in Central Asia,” 116.

<sup>5</sup> Poonam Mann, “Role of Central Asian Republics in the US-Led War on Terrorism,” in Mahavir Singh, *International Terrorism and Religious Extremism: Challenges to South and Central Asia* (Kolkata: Anamika Publishers and Distribution (Pvt) Ltd., 2004), 176, in Saud, “Political Islam in Central Asia,” 117.

<sup>6</sup> Snow et al., “Frame Alignment Processes, Micro-mobilisation and Movement Participation,” *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 4 (August 1986): 464–481, [www.jstor.org/stable/2095581](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2095581).

<sup>7</sup> Abu Bkr Siddique, “IMU Takes Roots in Increasingly Insecure Northern Afghan Provinces,” in Saud, “Political Islam in Central Asia.”

organisational morale. Nevertheless, it continued with its former leaders' mission. The current leader, Usman Ghazi, upon his appointment, stated "Our *Shaheed Ameer* (martyred leader), Muhammad Tohir Foruq (Yuldashev), gave us good news in many of his *khutbas* (sermons) that the wind of the caliphate was blowing and that we should not miss the caravan. Upon realisation of that dream, all members of our *jamaah* (party) unanimously became joyous."<sup>8</sup>

The IMU's leader, al-Burmi stated that "the Mujahedeen of Islam emigrated to the land of (North) Waziristan after the fall of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and sheltered with the Pakistani people but are now being punished by both the US and Pakistan for doing so."<sup>9</sup> Tahir Yuldashev once stated that "we must rid the world of infidels. There are no limits for us. Our goal is to take over not only Afghanistan and Pakistan but the whole world and to re-establish a caliphate as Allah commanded."<sup>10</sup> One of the leaders of the IMU, Abu Zar, stated that "the goal of the IMU and other mujahedeen is to establish the Islamic state in the areas of the subcontinent, which was once part of the Muslim (Mughal) rule... the expeditions to retake all these areas will be known as '*Ghazwat-ul-Hind*.'"<sup>11</sup> In another statement, he says "in Mali, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria and Somalia, there is a jihad going on, dear brothers. This is the victory of us-the mujahedin."<sup>12</sup> To attain this objective, the IMU joins its hands with few yet influential and powerful global militant organisations.

## **Social Support to IMU**

The socio-economic and political conditions in terms of social injustice, unemployment, political repression, hyper-presidentialism and ideological

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<sup>8</sup> Damon A. Mahi, "Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan Opens a Door to the Islamic State," *Combating Terrorism Center* 8, no. 6 (June 2015): 13.

<sup>9</sup> Manzar Abbas Zaidi, "Uzbek Militancy in Pakistan," *Center for International and Strategic Analysis*. Report (1) (2013), 14.

<sup>10</sup> Jeffery Thomas, "Transnational Terrorist Networks: The Afghanistan-Pakistan Connection," *Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress*, August 18, 2011, 8.

<sup>11</sup> Anzalone Christopher, "Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan: Down but not Out," *Foreign Policy*, November 20, 2012, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/11/20/the-islamic-movement-of-uzbekistan-down-but-not-out/>

<sup>12</sup> Jacob Zenn, "After Afghanistan, Central Asian Jihadis Look to New Theatres," *Central Asia Caucasus Analyst*, October 31, 2012, [www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5868](http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5868)

vacuum in post-Soviet Uzbekistan and the other parts of the Central Asian region are the major reasons for the IMU's support. State-controlled opposition has led to the frustration among youth which resort to 'underground' Islamist groups for their discontent towards the regimes.<sup>13</sup> The Organisation of Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) says that bad policies of the Central Asian regimes have led to the rise of Islamism. Andrew Tesoriere of the OSCE claims "I think there is a direct relationship between failures in the governments, failure by authority and the way in which people feel which kind of system must be observed... human rights even in the detention and during a trial must be respected. If you dent to that you are multiplying the problem."<sup>14</sup> "What can you expect from the Islamists when you have imprisoned their ten thousand members in Uzbekistan? They are imprisoned on falsified charges. This situation will further escalate the issue,"<sup>15</sup> maintains Abduljalil Boymatov, chairman of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU).

### **IMU's Activities in Central Asia**

Right after the independence of Uzbekistan, Islamists from Namangan demanded radical changes in their socio-economic and political system. Juma Namanagani<sup>16</sup> and Tahir Yuldashev<sup>17</sup> were at the forefront of demonstrations demanding the implementation of *Sharia* in Uzbekistan. When the government of Islam Karimov did not pay any heed to their demands they resorted to violent means, occupying some of the important government buildings and taking officials hostage. The situation forced Islam Karimov to arrive at Namanagan to negotiate with the Islamists. Karimov assured them that their demands would be reviewed by the Uzbek

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<sup>13</sup> Ye Zhacheva, M Laumvliss, L Muzaparova and D Kaliyeva, *New Challenges and New Geopolitics in Central Asia: After September 9/11* (Almaty: Kazakh Institute for Strategic Studies, 2003), 39.

<sup>14</sup> [www.youtube.com+n31Uw2TSISE](http://www.youtube.com+n31Uw2TSISE), June 20, 2013, in Saud, "Political Islam in Central Asia," 120.

<sup>15</sup> Author's interview with the respondent on August 26th, 2013, Ibid. Saud, "Political Islam in Central Asia."

<sup>16</sup> A paratrooper in the Soviet military, who later joined Tauba group, established the IMU. He was a born fighter and not an Islamic scholar. However, he had a huge impression on his followers. For more details, see Ahmad Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (Lahore: Vanguard, 2002), 137-138 and 143, in Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Yuldashev had awesome communications skills. He was a great debater. He used to be a prayer leader in a local mosque of Namangan.

legislatures but they insisted on the immediate implementation of *Sharia*.<sup>18</sup> The negotiations failed and Karimov returned to Tashkent, ordering security forces to crackdown against the Islamists.

Finding their manoeuvring space extremely limited, the Islamists fled to Tajikistan to fight against the old Soviet Socialists along with the opposition Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) and secular democratic parties like *Rostakhez* and *Lalai Badakhshan*. The Uzbek Islamists used the Pamir region as their base. Namanagani developed a strong network of local intelligence, which helped him keep Tajik forces out of his area of influence. By initiating some businesses like cattle breeding and transportation in the region, he helped the local population to overcome unemployment. This economic benefit also encouraged the local population to support Uzbek fighters.

When the civil war in Tajikistan ended after the conclusion of the General Peace Accord in 1997, the Uzbek fighters remained stationed in the Pamir region. Despite attempts by the Tajik regime to persuade Uzbek Islamists to leave Tajikistan, Namangani and his fighters stayed. Rehmanov's regime had to request Haji Akbar Turajonzode, an ex-official mufti of Tajikistan, to convince Namangani to leave. After a series of negotiations, Namangani agreed to leave for Afghanistan along with his fighters and their families, subject to the provision of safe passage to Afghanistan.<sup>19</sup>

In Central Asia, the major offensive of the IMU came in August 1999, when a group of IMU fighters launched an incursion into Kyrgyzstan through Tajikistan. They occupied an enclave and took three Japanese geologists hostage, who were working there, in addition to some American mountaineers, who fled from the IMU custody later. Almost 8,500 people were displaced and an additional 25 killed due to fighting between Kyrgyz security forces and the IMU fighters.<sup>20</sup> Ransom money worth US\$50,000 was taken by the IMU for the release of the Japanese geologists, in addition to safe passage to Afghanistan, which was also given to the IMU fighters by

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<sup>18</sup> Rashid, *Jihad*, in Saud, "Political Islam in Central Asia."

<sup>19</sup> For Details see, Adam Saud, "Islamic Renaissance party of Tajikistan: Past, Present and Future," *Central Asia Journal*, no. 77 (Summer 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Zhacheva, Laumvliss, Muzaparova and Kaliyeva, *New Challenges and New Geo-Politics in Central Asia*, in Saud, "Political Islam in Central Asia," 124.

Kyrgyz security forces.<sup>21</sup> Six bombs exploded on the route of Islam Karimov's motorcade in June same year. The bombs exploded before his motorcade arrived at the scene and thus, the president remained unhurt.

The regime was quick to blame the IMU for an attempt on Karimov's life; however, the IMU rejected the official claims and stated that it had nothing to do with the explosions. In the summers of 2000, the IMU encroached again into the Kyrgyz and Uzbek territory via Tajikistan. However, security forces were more alert and organised this time. The IMU faced heavy losses in the ensuing skirmishes with the security forces and had to flee back to Afghanistan. According to the commander of Kyrgyz army's southern command, the IMU fighters included Arabs, Central Asian, Uighurs and Afghan nationals.<sup>22</sup> In 2001, the IMU reached the zenith of its strength when it had weapons like the Russian made "Combat Machine Pehotey and Bronye transporters along with rocket launchers and RSZO-BM Grad."<sup>23</sup> It had around 10,000 fighters in Afghanistan who were paid between US\$100 to US\$500 per month with the financial help of al-Qaeda and Uzbek diaspora in Saudi Arabia.<sup>24</sup>

The year 2004, proved to be one of the bloodiest years in post-independent Uzbekistan. During March 2004, the militants attacked security personnel in Charsu market of Tashkent, killing six of them. During July 2004, the suicide bombers blew themselves up outside of Israeli and the US embassies and the office of the Prosecutor General in Tashkent. This was the first ever suicide bombing in Central Asia, carried out by the female suicide bombers. A relatively unknown group, the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) claimed responsibility for the attacks. It was revealed later that the IJU was a splinter group of the IMU.<sup>25</sup> In 2005, the security forces opened fire on unarmed peaceful demonstrators including women and children in

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<sup>21</sup> Josie Le Blond, "Analysis: Radical Uzbek Groups Recruiting in Europe," *Washington Times*, 2010, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/jan/20/analys-radical-uzbek-groups-recruiting-in-europe>.

<sup>22</sup> Svante E Cornell, "Narcotics, Radicalism and Armed Conflict in Central Asia: The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 17, no. 4 (2005): 627.

<sup>23</sup> "Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan," *Analitika*, last modified February 2012, <http://analitika.org>

<sup>24</sup> Svante E Cornell, "Narcotics, Radicalism and Armed Conflict in Central Asia," 619-639.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Weitz, "Storm Clouds Over Central Asia: Revival of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 27 (2004): 481.

Namangan, which killed around 800 people. The protestors were demonstrating against the ‘illegal’ detention of 22 businessmen-cum-philanthropists on charges of their alleged connection with the terrorists.<sup>26</sup> The IMU, however, has remained active in different regions of Tajikistan especially in those areas where it had been stationed during the Tajik Civil War and many of its supporters and members are under trial in Tajikistan.

## **Beyond Central Asia: Targeting Pakistan**

The IMU remained involved in many terrorist and illegal activities in Pakistan. It is stated that in Tashkent, the terrorist activities of 2004, have a connection with Waziristan. The Central Asian security experts and officials claim that the terrorists reached Uzbekistan from Pakistan through Afghanistan. According to the Uzbek President, Islam Karimov, “the evidence from the people arrested in connection with attacks, particularly maps allegedly in their possession—showed they came from Pakistan.”<sup>27</sup>

After the alliance with TTP, the IMU’s first major attack in Pakistan was in Miranshah in 2009. Four people were killed during that attack. The casualties could have been much higher had the security officials not targeted the suicide bomber before reaching the target. A local policeman claimed that “a suicide bomber wanted to target a convoy of troops but blew himself up after his vehicle came under fire from a nearby paramilitary check post.”<sup>28</sup> It is also pertinent to note that it was a matter of the IMU’s survival as well as proving itself as a great asset to TTP. According to the then Army Chief General, Ashfaq Pervez Kayani, “It is a do or die situation for [the Uzbeks] so they are scrambling for protection and would do anything for survival.”<sup>29</sup> Pakistan’s military decided to launch another offensive against the IMU due to the IMU’s involvement in the execution of many pro-government local informers.

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<sup>26</sup> “Bullets were Falling Like Rain: The Andijan Massacre,” *Human Rights Watch*, June 6, 2005, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2005/06/06/bullets-were-falling-rain/andijan-massacre-may-13-2005#page>.

<sup>27</sup> Bruce Pannier, “Uzbekistan: Karimov Elaborates on Recent Attacks, Criticises West,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Library*, [www.refrl.org/featuresarticleprint/2004/04/f9c2f480-2764-4463-ae16-0d3c7b99](http://www.refrl.org/featuresarticleprint/2004/04/f9c2f480-2764-4463-ae16-0d3c7b99).

<sup>28</sup> “Miranshah Attack Claims Four Lives,” *Aaj News*, April 4, 2009, <http://aaj.tv/2009/04/miranshah-suicide-attack-claims-four-lives/>

<sup>29</sup> Imtiaz Gul, “Uzbeks in Waziristan,” *Friday Times*, June 13, 2013, <http://www.thefridaytimes.com/tft/uzbeks-in-waziristan/>

Nevertheless, the IMU had a very strong presence in both North and South Waziristan due to two major reasons: firstly, the charismatic leadership of Tahir Yuldashev, who was also an excellent orator and had a sufficient number of fighters. Secondly, the local connections enabled the IMU to move more freely in the areas of their presence in comparison to the militants from other foreign militia groups. The military operations and the drone attacks by the US resulted in an increased number of beheadings of the alleged government spies in Waziristan.<sup>30</sup> Since the locals did not dare to confront the IMU militants due to the latter's overt cruelty, the Punjabi Taliban were encouraged to counter them in South Waziristan. The strategy worked and the IMU militants were forced to relocate to North Waziristan due to their relatively good relationship with the Mehsud tribes. Till 2014, the IMU remained settled in North Waziristan. It had to flee to Afghanistan when the Pakistan Army started the operation *Zarb-e-Azb*.

The IMU has been responsible for carrying out many terrorist activities in Pakistan. Such activities include suicide bombings, kidnapping for ransom, attacks on airports and military bases. The IMU claimed the attacks carried out on Peshawar, Karachi and Quetta airports. The Pakistani security forces also released the photos of those terrorists who were killed in Mehran Base Attack in Karachi, who could be easily identified as Uzbek from their appearance.

The IMU members belong to multiple states and region. Besides the Central Asians, Afghans and Arabs, the Chechens have also joined it. Ismatillah Faizullah, Deputy Head of the Uzbek Mission to Islamabad, says that "Uzbeks constitute only 35 per cent of the IMU membership. 65 per cent of its members are non-Uzbeks."<sup>31</sup> In February 2012, the security forces killed 16 IMU militants, who were Turkmen, in northern Afghanistan. Rahimullah Yousafzai also confirms that the IMU is a multi-ethnic and multi-national organisation.

In the Pakistani tribal areas, the first important operation against the Uzbek militants was started during 2004 but most of the Uzbeks, including Yuldashev, narrowly escaped. "Pakistan Army intercepted radio signals in

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<sup>30</sup> Zaidi, "Uzbek Militancy in Pakistan," 7.

<sup>31</sup> Ismatillah Faizullah, Deputy Head of the Uzbek Mission in Pakistan, in discussion with the authors, Islamabad, November 16, 2012, in Saud, "Political Islam in Central Asia," 128.

Uzbek and Chechen languages,” said the Lt. General Safdar Hussain,<sup>32</sup> who was in command of that operation. One important IMU ambush of the local tribesmen was witnessed during March 2007, when the IMU fighters had an encounter with the locals in South Waziristan. This ambush reportedly led to the deaths of over 130 militants, mostly Uzbeks. Around 60 of them were also captured by the locals.<sup>33</sup>

In Pakistan, major terrorist activities by the IMU started in 2007. It is widely believed that it had taken an active part in the Lal Masjid saga. It is suspected that some of its militants have travelled from Pakistan to Uzbekistan, several times, under the cover of cloth merchants. They used different airports to travel to and from Uzbekistan to Pakistan.<sup>34</sup> It is pertinent to note that since most of the IMU members can speak excellent Pushto and Urdu languages, it is easier for them to hide their identity in Pakistan. They also had contacts in Balochistan, especially with the *Quetta Shura*. In 2008, Prime Minister of Pakistan, Yousaf Raza Gillani, was told in a briefing that around 8,000 foreign militants are present in FATA, out of which 4,800 belong to the IMU.<sup>35</sup>

When Maulvi Sufi Muhammad of Tehreek-e-Nifazi Shariati Muhammadi (TNSM) came back from Afghanistan, after facing defeat in OEF, he was detained by the Pakistani security officials. His son-in-law, Molvi Fazlullah, came to the forefront in 2007, when he started an FM radio channel in Swat to preach Islamic teachings. He and Maulvi Faqeer Muhammad from Bajaur Agency of FATA joined hands together and extended their support to the Taliban. Maulvi Fazlullah had the support of the IMU who were later included in his *Shura*. According to the locals, these men always used to cover their faces and had a different physique from the locals.<sup>36</sup> It is widely believed that furnishing harsh punishments and carrying out executions in worse cases in Swat were the policies of the IMU.

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<sup>32</sup> Mike Redman, “Central Asian Militant Groups Remain Active in Pakistan,” Eurasia Net: Eurasia Insight, March 24, 2004, [www.eurasianet.org/department/insight/articles/eav032404\\_Pr.shtm](http://www.eurasianet.org/department/insight/articles/eav032404_Pr.shtm)

<sup>33</sup> Longo, “Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan,” in Saud, “Political Islam in Central Asia,” 129.

<sup>34</sup> Zaidi, “Uzbek Militancy in Pakistan,” 9.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 11.

The Uzbeks also trained members of TNSM to prepare explosives and learn the tactics of employing suicide bombers. The influence of the foreign, notably the IMU, militants on Fazlullah grew so much that he had to align himself with the global jihadi organisations especially al-Qaeda. This influence led him to join TTP in December 2007, and pledge allegiance to Baitullah Mehsud. Henceforth, Fazlullah had to take directions from Mehsud to run the affairs of Swat. This connection between Fazlullah and TTP came to affect the peace deals in FATA and Swat with the government. The peace deal in Waziristan, which allowed Fazlullah to govern Swat, failed when Pakistan Army started an operation against militants in Waziristan.

The IMU attacked a Pakistani politician from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province (KPK), Afrasiyab Khattak in Peshawar in 2008. The attack killed 25 people. Fortunately, Khattak survived the attack.<sup>37</sup> The IMU was involved in an attack on Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) in Lahore in March 2010. This attack killed 12 people besides injuring 89.<sup>38</sup> It was retaliation against Pakistan Military offensive and the US drone attacks on militants in FATA. The TTP spokesperson stated that “If the government does not halt the military operation in the tribal area and drone attacks continue, TTP will continue suicide bombings (on government installations).”<sup>39</sup> When security agencies carried out a search operation, in connection to the March 2010 twin suicide bombings, which killed over 50 people, out of over a dozen arrests four suspects were Uzbeks.<sup>40</sup> The planning for the attack had been coordinated in Lahore on behalf of the Uzbek commander in North Waziristan.<sup>41</sup> The 16 militants of the IMU, who belonged to Turkmenistan, were killed in North Waziristan on February 16, 2012. “Yes, Turkmen also fight in Pakistan-Afghanistan border region. They are here because they cannot operate in Turkmenistan... they have joined their hands with the IMU in a hope that they will bring down the

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<sup>37</sup> Abu-Bakr Sydyk, “The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan Has Recruited More and More Immigrants from Central Asia,” last modified on December 28, 2012, [http://rus.azattyq.org/content/imu\\_central\\_asia/2251337.html](http://rus.azattyq.org/content/imu_central_asia/2251337.html).

<sup>38</sup> “Lahore Attack,” *Dawn*, March 9, 2010, <http://www.dawn.com/news/846336>.

<sup>39</sup> Zaidi, “Uzbek Militancy,” 10.

<sup>40</sup> Saeed Shah, “Lahore Hit by Double Bomb,” *Guardian*, March 12, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/mar/12/lahore-hit-double-bomb-attack>

<sup>41</sup> Zaidi, “Uzbek Militancy,” 10.

autocratic regime at home and will replace that with an Islamic one” says Rahimullah Yousafzai.<sup>42</sup>

On May 12, 2011, around 15 militants entered Mehran Base of Pakistan Navy. Two P3-C Orion aircrafts and a helicopter were destroyed in the attack.<sup>43</sup> A majority of the militants killed were Uzbeks. The December 16, 2012, attack on Bacha Khan International Airport Peshawar was claimed by TTP. Out of 10 terrorists killed in the ensuing encounter with the security agencies, five militants were suspected as Uzbeks.<sup>44</sup> The IMU militants were also involved in the Kamra Airbase attack in August 2012. On May 12, 2013, over a dozen people were killed in a suicide attack in Quetta. The IMU claimed responsibility for that attack. The IMU was also involved in the kidnapping for ransom of son of the former Punjab Governor, Salman Taseer, who was later escaped from their custody in Afghanistan.

The June 2014 attack on Jinnah International Airport Karachi was also claimed by the IMU, 34 people lost their lives in the said incident. A statement by Usman Ghazi, leader of the IMU, stated on the official website of the IMU, “On midnight of Monday, 10 brave martyrdom seeking mujahids [soldiers] of Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan wearing their explosive-filled vests attacked very special section of Karachi International Airport of Pakistan which is not visible to the common folk visiting the Airport. The operation continued nearly six hours and our mujahids destroyed many of the fighter jets, the American drones and other military planes, which were in that special section not visible to the passengers along with killing many security forces. In the end, these 10 mujahids who sold their lives for *Jannah* (heaven) became *shaheed* [martyr] as they were eager for it. Verily, all strength, praises and honour belongs to Allah.”<sup>45</sup>

Around a dozen Uzbek militants attacked Quetta airbase on August 16, 2014. All of them were killed by the security forces before they could have

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<sup>42</sup> Author’s interview with the respondent in Peshawar, in Saud, “Political Islam in Central Asia,” 128.

<sup>43</sup> “Terrorists Attack Navy Air Base in Karachi: Destroy Three Aircrafts,” *Dawn*, May 22, 2011, <http://www.dawn.com/news/630878>

<sup>44</sup> “TTP Using Uzbeks to Conduct Terrorist Attacks in Pakistan,” *News*, December 18, 2012, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/402174-ttp-using-uzbeks-to-conduct-terrorist-attacks>

<sup>45</sup> “IMU Claims its Ticket to Heaven,” *Pakistan Today*, June 11, 2014, <http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2014/06/11/imu-claims-its-ticket-to-heaven/>

entered the air bases. Lt. Gen Nasir Khan Janjua, the then Commander of the Southern Command stated that “we killed all terrorists before they could enter the bases...no terrorist entered the bases. All installations are safe and intact.”<sup>46</sup> After these attacks in 2014, Pakistan government decided to start an indiscriminate offensive against ‘all kinds’ of terrorists. The Operation *Zarb-e-Azb* has primarily targeted foreign militants, especially the IMU. The IMU has fled back to Afghanistan and is currently active in Northern Afghanistan and to some extent in Tajikistan. It has been reported that there has been a split within the ranks of the IMU and it has divided into two major groups. One group has joined the IS while the other is still affiliated with the Taliban. Usman Ghazi has declared his support to Abu Bakr Baghdadi.

## Conclusion

Although Pakistani security forces have succeeded in pushing the IMU out of its territories, the threat of IS and its penetration deep into the urban centres of Pakistan is really an alarming situation. The IMU’s close connections with the IS, on the one hand, and the Taliban on the other are a constant threat for Pakistan’s security. A fragile internal or external security situation in Pakistan can bring back this menace to Pakistan which the latter can never afford.

In order to keep the momentum of the IMU, Yaldashev stated before his death that “this movement does not stop with someone’s death or martyrdom. This caravan will continue...this caravan shed a lot of blood...has suffered a lot.” “This (Islamic) knowledge and jihad are *amanat* (trust) of Allah for you and Allah will ask about the *amanat*. This jihad should be purely for Allah’s will and not for the kingdom, for nation or tribe.” “We have this goal that we will establish the army of *Ummah* and they will only serve the *Ummah*. This special army will only be in the service of Islamic Khilafah. And this will be the army which will liberate Palestine.”<sup>47</sup> Such statements have two dimensions: the IMU is a global jihadi organisation with trans-continental aspirations which is least interested in Uzbekistan because it has neither the support nor conducive environment to operate in Uzbekistan and it merely wants to keep itself in

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<sup>46</sup> Saleem Shahid, “12 Uzbeks Killed in Attacks on Airbases,” *Dawn*, August 16, 2014, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1125636>

<sup>47</sup> [www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dpiD=cQe-m](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dpiD=cQe-m), accessed on August 10, 2010,

the limelight of media coverage. Whatever the motive is, Pakistan must take every step to counter all kind of terrorism from taking a further foothold on its territory.