Genesis, Strategies And Threat Perspectives Of Islamic Movement Of Uzbekistan (IMU): Central Asia And Beyond [In Pakistan]

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Abstract

Pakistan has been facing the threat of religious extremism and terrorism for the last two decades. This phenomenon has both national and transnational roots with the involvement of militant outfits like Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), AL-Qaeda, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and others. In this context, the presence of IMU in Pakistan and its lethal operational activities cannot be ignored. After the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) of the US in Afghanistan, IMU incubated itself in erstwhile FATA and carried out its ferocious activities by joining hands with local as well as international militant organizations. The current article argues that IMU felt the group’s presence by attacking important government installations and permeating its Jihadi militant doctrines in local organization in Pakistan. However, Pakistani forces through its tactical strategy not only managed to break the alliances of IMU with other organizations but also weed out IMU from Pakistani territory by launching successful military operation [Operation Zerb-e-Azab] and others. Furthermore, the research also focuses tactical mapping of IMU, its genesis, activities in central Asia and Pakistan and its affiliation with other Jihadi organizations, its ideological grounding and threat perspectives. It contends that though IMU has no active presence in Pakistan and Pakistani military operations and strategies have been successful, the Pakistani state apparatus has to be cautious in future in this regard.
Keywords: Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Militant Strategies, Genesis of militant groups, Pakistan, Central Asia

Introduction and Background of the study

Following the event of 11 September 2001, in October the same year, United States launched Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) to oust the Taliban government in Afghanistan and to hunt down al-Qaeda, Taliban and their affiliates. Following this US operation, most of the militant outfits, including Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), moved to Pakistani tribal areas through the porous border, Durand Line\(^1\), and took refuge there. Members of IMU and other militants’ groups entered into marriages with tribal families and used religious connections. The relationship of these tribal people with militant groups was not new and can even be traced back to 1979 when they were jointly involved in the war against former USSR. It is an axiomatic fact that the environment for IMU and other militant outfits was very conducive to live peacefully in Tribal region. Safe havens used by IMU in Pakistan were Sheen Warsak, Kaloosha, Wana and Azam Warsak\(^2\).

However, the relationships were somehow strained in 2004 when clashes erupted between the fighters of IMU and local tribesmen when the former pronounced that the later shall abide by their orders. Moreover, as the security concerns were troubling Pakistan and pressure was mounting on Pakistani state and the military, Pakistani military in the same year, launched a series of military operations in different parts of tribal regions. These operations not only undermined the position of IMU in the area but brought IMU and Pakistani state military into a direct confrontation which was, undoubtedly, real setback for the organization.

Financially, IMU was supported by al-Qaeda, therefore, it did not face any real problem. However, this support was not free of cost as IMU was, in return, providing training and fighters to al-Qaeda. These nexuses provided strength to IMU due to which it made its presence possible in South Waziristan. Nonetheless, tension between IMU and locals were augmenting with each passing day and on the other hand, Pakistan army offensives against the group were intensified. So, both (locals and military) wanted to expel IMU from tribal region. Pakistani military launched a successful operation against IMU with the active support of Mullah Nazir [Powerful Chieftain]. Resultantly, IMU was pushed from South Waziristan to rough terrains of North Waziristan.\(^3\)

\(^1\) Durand Line is the 2430 Kilometers international border between Pakistan and Afghanistan which was demarcated in 1893 between British India and Afghanistan by Mortimer Durand, a British Civil servant, see Omrani Bijan “The Durand Line: History And Problems Of The Afghan-Pakistan Border” Asian Affairs, XL, no. II, (July 2009) Available at https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03068370902871508
The year of 2007 is significant in the context of militancy and military offensives in Pakistan as Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was established under the patronship of Bait-Ullah Mehsud. Following the establishment of TTP, many militant groups either joined it or aligned with it. IMU also entered an alliance with TTP owing to strategic necessities. This alliance ensured IMU survival in terms of shelters in erstwhile FATA. At the same time, with the close collaboration of TTP it carried out fierce attacks on law enforcement agencies of Pakistan. Since, TTP was involved in kidnapping and extortion to generate its financial resources, therefore, IMU extended its cooperation in this regard to win the confidence of Bait Ullah Mehsud. In 2014, TTP and IMU jointly attacked International Airport Karachi in which 26 people including security personnel and workers were killed and eighteen were severely injured. In this attack ten Uzbek attackers were also shot dead. Though in subsequent few years the presence of TTP as well as IMU was felt in intensity in the country especially in north western Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and tribal regions, the series of military operations broke the strength of both. Thus, at present IMU has minimal presence and least strength in Pakistan however the movement can be a threat and the trajectory of its activities is worth exploring.

Such is the significance of IMU in the context of Pakistan and the so called ‘war on terror’. In this backdrop it is highly demanded to analyze the origin, evolution, support, and tactics of the group with a focus on Pakistani faction of it. Moreover, the handling of this group by Pakistani state authorities is also highly required. Thus, the current research explores and covers the ideational and operational capabilities, origin, and transnational contacts with other militant outfits of the Islamic movement of Uzbekistan. Moreover, as the domestic, regional, and extra-regional dynamics are rapidly changing; therefore, in this context, IMU future in Pakistan has also been critically analyzed.

**IMU: Evolution, goals and strategies in Central Asia (Uzbekistan)**

After the disintegration of Soviet Union, the newly independent central Asian states, including Uzbekistan, faced multiple domestic challenges in terms of social injustice, political repression and hyper-presidentialism. Opposition controlled by the state could not provide relief to which led to frustration especially among the youths. They [youths] moved to join the ranks of Islamist groups which further penetrated discontent in their hearts and minds against the regime. In this context, the Organization of Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) argues that policies adopted by Central Asian regimes are discriminatory which are favoring only the elite class. This approach has led to the rise of Islamism in these states. Likewise, Andrew Tesoriere of the OSCE further

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5 Demon Mehal, "The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan Opens a Door to the Islamic State – Combating Terrorism Center at West Point," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, last modified November 16, 2017, https://ctc.usma.edu/the-islamic-movement-of-uzbekistan-opens-a-door-to-the-islamic-state/.

states that “provision of human rights and their respect should be observed at any cost but regimes in CARs have been failed in this regard and further failure means to multiply the problems.” Apart from this, reservations were also expressed by Abdul Jalil Boymatov, chairman of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU) when he stated that “on falsified charges thousands of Islamists are behind the bar which is against right to fair trial and this kind of approach will, undoubtedly, further escalate the issue.” Such a context makes the central Asian republics and no doubt some of the South Asian republics a hotspot for Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the IMU, which the movement has been utilizing for its propagation and interests. In turn, these loopholes contributed to social support to Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in Uzbekistan and even across in other neighboring states.

Central Asian states’ political and socio-economic system was largely influenced by communism. After getting independence right wing Islamists from Namangan of Uzbekistan started opposition against the existing regime and demanded radical changes in political and socio-economic system based on Islamic Shariah. Tahir Yuldashev and Juma Namanagani were at the forefront to deliver the message of Islamic changes in the system to the masses. The movement which was based on verbal opposition turned into violent struggle when Islam Krimove did not pay any attention to the demands of the Islamists. They not only occupied important building but also hostage government officials. The uneven situation forced Karimove to move to Namangan to appease the Islamists. During the negotiations Karimove extended assurance that legislature of Uzbekistan will review the demands accordingly. But Islamists wanted that demands should be ensured instantly. Resultantly, dialogue could not provide any successful roadmap and Krimove came back to Tashkent where he ordered the security forces to launch crack-down against Islamists.

Since, the space for maneuvering had been narrow down the Islamists moved to Tajikistan and joined hands with Opposition Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) and Rostakhez and Lalai Badakhshan. Both the parties are secular in nature but were fighting against the old socialists. IMU started its activities from Pamir region. Despite this, Namanagani built up a strong network of intelligence which played a critical role in keeping the Tajik forces away from his areas of influence. For achieving the social support, IMU took initiatives to reduce the financial miseries of local people where IMU was stationed. It took measures to reduce the level of unemployment by giving them money and resources. Furthermore, IMU provided cattle breeding facilities and transportation in the region. These bloated steps were, no doubt, encouraging for the local population which gave an open space to Uzbek fighters in the region.

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7 www.youtube.com+n31Uw2TSISE, June 20, 2013, in Saud, “Political Islam in Central Asia,” 120.
Civil war in Tajikistan came into an end in 1997 by signing the General Peace Accord but Uzbek fighters were remained in Pamir region. The government of Tajikistan forced the Islamists of IMU to leave Tajikistan but in vain because Namangani and his fighters were not willing to leave the region. When the situation further became worse, Rehanove requested Haji Akbar Turajonzode [Ex-official Mufti of Tajikistan] to persuade Namangani to decamp its fighters from the areas of Tajikistan. Thus, after series of dialogue sessions, Namangani agreed to leave for Afghanistan by giving assurance that no hurdles will be interposed during the moment and safe passage will be provided to fighters.10

In 1998 IMU was founded and in August the next year, IMU formally started operations in Central Asia when the organization attacked the borders areas of Tajikistan via Kyrgyzstan. members of IMU captured the enclave in which three Japanese geologists were kept hostage along with some American mountaineers who would run away later from the custody of IMU. Fighting between the fighters of IMU and security forces of Kyrgyz round about 8,500 people was internally displaced and 25 were killed. In a bargaining move, IMU demanded $50,000 as ransom amount for the return of Japanese geologists, addition to, safe passage to IMU fighters to Afghanistan.11 Islam Karimove was attacked by the militant outfit in same years on his motorcade but before his motorcade arrived the bomb exploded and president remained unhurt.

IMU was quickly blamed by the regime for exploding bombs on Karimove but IMU swiftly rejected by saying that 'the organization has nothing to do with explosions. In summer 2000, the fighters of IMU were involved in skirmishes against the security forces of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and tried to capture the important entry points near Tajikistan. But, IMU could not succeeded this time and bore heavy losses at the hands of security forces of Kyrgyzstan due to which IMU fighters move back to Afghanistan. Commander of Kyrgyz Army categorically stated that IMU is not just limited to Uzbek fighters but includes the nationals of Afghanistan, Central Asia, Arabs and Uighurs of China.12 It is an axiomatic reality that IMU fighters had lack of equipment’s which was affecting its operational capacity but after getting ‘Russian made Combat Machine Pehotey and Bronye transporters along with rocket launchers and RSZOBM Grad’ its strength was enhanced.13 Moreover, it was also disclosed that 10,000 fighters are roundly stationed in Afghanistan which are paid from $100 to $500 per month by al-Qaeda and Uzbek diaspora in Saudi Arabia.14

After the independence of Uzbekistan, the year 2004 was one of the deadliest years in its history when in the month of March Charsu market of Tashkent was attacked by the militants in which six security personnel were killed. Furthermore, lethality of attacks was intensified when

suicide attacker blew himself up outside the embassies of the US and Israel and on the office of
Prosecutor General in Tashkent. This was first ever attack in Central Asia in which a female suicide
bomber exploded. The responsibility of all these attacks was claimed by an unknown group Islamic
Jihad Union (IJU). However, later on, it was revealed that the group was a part of IMU which has
now been splintered. In 2005, in an open firing by the security forces on peaceful demonstrators
in Namangan in which 800 people were killed including women and children. The demonstration
was mainly conducted for the release of 22 businessmen-cum-philanthropists. The government
detained them for their alleged connection with terrorist groups. The fundamental objectives of
Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), at the time of its inception, were limited to overthrow
the government of Uzbek president Islam Karimove and to establish Islamic Khilafat. Later on,
with changing political landscape, objectives were also altered. Notably, IMU carries out most of
its activities in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria and Iraq other than in Uzbekistan since its
establishment in 1998. During the civil war in Uzbekistan (1992-1997) IMU staunchly supported
United Tajik Opposition (UTO) – alliance of religious and secular political Parties – against the
authoritarian regime of Emomali Rehmanove of Tajikistan. However, in 1997, peace accord
between the UTO and the government forced IMU to migrate to Afghanistan which was that time
under the control of Taliban.

Tahir Yuldashav, one of the leaders of IMU, was in close contact with al-Qaeda and its
leadership. Osma Bin Laden encouraged Yaldashve to persuade Juma Namanagani (Leader of
IMU) to place himself with its fighters in Afghanistan. After 9/11 incident, the US started OEF in
Afghanistan, in which Namanagani was killed by the US forces. This situation forced the
remaining leadership and fighters of IMU to move to erstwhile FATA (region of Pakistan). Before
the launch of operation Zerb-e-Azb by Pakistan army in 2014 against the militant outfits, IMU
hided in North Waziristan and remained there in the tribal region for a long time. Nevertheless,
IMU could not keep its permanent sustainability there and once again got safe sanctuaries in
Afghanistan. Some of its fighters joined the ranks of Daesh and fighting in Syria and Iraq. IMU,
currently, has adopted pragmatic approach under the leadership [Amir] of Usman Ghazi. On one
hand, IMU is in a close alliance with Afghan Taliban, while on the other hand, secretly supports
IS and al-Qaeda without declaring overt allegiance to them.

The fundamental objective of this organization is to topple Islam Karimove’s autocratic
regime termed as ‘un-Islamic’ by the movement and replace it with Islamic Sharai’h. It was
categorically stated by Tahir Yuldashev that establishment of Islamic state in Uzbekistan is
inevitable as established by prophet Muhammad (SAW) in Medina. He argued that the social evils
which are deeply entrenched in society of Uzbekistan are inequalities, discrimination, bribery, and

and Terrorism, 27 (2004): 481
16 “Bullets were Falling Like Rain: The Andijan Massacre,” Human Rights Watch, June 6, 2005,
17 www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dpiD=cQe-m, in Saud, “Political Islam in Central Asia,” 116.
coercion\textsuperscript{18}. Additionally, Yuldashev further expressed that “the objectives of the IMU is to fight against mistreatment and oppression inside our country, against bribery, inequalities and to liberate of our Muslim fellows from jail who will vindicate those Muslims who have been killed in detainment? Obviously, we will. We think of it as our commitment to retaliate for them. We don’t repent our commitment of jihad against the Uzbek government”.\textsuperscript{19} However, the initial objectives have been molded and expanded with expansion of the group from Uzbekistan to central and South Asia. Likewise, the main objectives of imposing Islamic Shariah in the world, especially in Muslim world and working for violent ‘jihad’ against infidels and their supporters remains intact. As an organization, the movement employ particular strategy to this end.

The strategy of IMU has been to station itself in border of Central Asia and South Asia and to build strong nexus with trans-national Jihadi outfits present in this region. It is declared goals of Yuldashev that “with the collaboration of al-Qaeda and other Jihadis, firstly, the un-Islamic government of Afghanistan and Pakistan will be overthrown and rule of Islamic Shariah would be enforced. Secondly, one section will move to India and other will go to Central Asian States to expand the process of imposition of Shariah”,\textsuperscript{20} There is no denial to fact that after the death of IMU’s two charismatic and founding leaders-Juma Namangani and Tahir Yuldashev- the organizations faced a deep setback, yet the current leader, Usman Ghazi, upon his appointment expressed “Our Shaheed Ameer (martyred pioneer), Muhammad Tohir Foruq (Yuldashev), gave us torch-bearing guidelines in a large number of his Khutbas (Sermons) that the wave of the caliphate was blowing and that we ought not miss the convoy. Endless supply of that fantasy, all individuals from our Jamaah (party) unanimously became joyous\textsuperscript{21}.”

Similarly, another leader of IMU, al-Burmi argued that “Jihad against the US forces and Pakistani forces will be continued. IMU Mujahedeen took refuge in North Waziristan after the US attack on Afghanistan but Pakistani forces launched operations against those Mujahedeen who are fighting for the uplifting of Islam and oppressions committed by the west. Therefore, they will not go unpunished\textsuperscript{22}.” In addition, Tahir Yuldashev said one step ahead that” there are no boundaries and limits for IMU. The organization goals are not only confined to take over Pakistan and Afghanistan but seek to establish global Khilafat and for this purpose struggle (Jihad) will sternly be continued against infidels all over the world\textsuperscript{23}.” IMU’s pragmatic approach can deeply be analyzed by the statement of Abu Zar [one of the leaders of IMU] “IMU wants to revise the history

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} ibid
\item \textsuperscript{21} Damon A. Mahi, “Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan Opens a Door to the Islamic State,” Combating Terrorism Center 8, no. 6 (June 2015): 13.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Manzar Abbas Zaidi, “Uzbek Militancy in Pakistan,” Center for International and Strategic Analysis.” Report (1) (2013), 14.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Jeffery Thomas, “Transnational Terrorist Networks: The Afghanistan-Pakistan Connection,” Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress, August 18, 2011.8.
\end{itemize}
of subcontinent by establishing Muslim rule in all its parts as founded by Mughal rulers (1526-1707)\textsuperscript{24}.” He said further that Jihad is continued in its full swing in Mali, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria and Somalia which is a matter of proud for the Mujahadeen of IMU and to achieve its broader perspective IMU has built close nexus with influential global militant outfits\textsuperscript{25}. Thus, the above stated objectives and strategies are mixed closely with the program of IMU. Moreover, though the organization tends to have a transnational agenda and objective because of the peculiar circumstances it had presence in Pakistan’s tribal areas and is focused more on Pakistan and Afghanistan. In this context, IMU has been and is a potential threat to the security of Pakistan and its border areas. As the group has been able to expand across the region to South Asia, to Pakistan. It has been actively carrying out activities in Pakistan which are discussed below.

**IMU Militant Landscape beyond Central Asia: Pakistan in Perspective**

Though IMU has its roots in Uzbekistan it has spread across Central Asia and even South Asia to Pakistan and across. In this context, it can be argued that, owing to such a history and composition, IMU has maintained strong holds in Pakistan and involve in lethal activities. It is perceived that the terrorists’ attacks of 2004 in Tashkent were designed in Waziristan [erstwhile FATA area of Pakistan]. Security experts of Central Asia and officials even claimed that members of IMU were trained in Pakistan and reached Uzbekistan via Afghanistan. President Karimov evidently stated that “the maps which have been recovered from arrested militants’ show their connections with tribal areas of Pakistan.” \textsuperscript{26} This informs that there is a significant connection between IMU and militants of Pakistan and Afghanistan and Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan is central in this.

In 2009, after a formal alliance with Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the movement (IMU) carried out its first ever attack in Miranshah, tribal areas of Pakistan, in which four people were killed. It was a suicide attack in which the suicide bomber could not reach the target and if that was the case, the attack would have caused much higher level of damage. A local policeman claimed “that the target of suicide bomber was to hit convoy of troops but could not reach that target and blew up near the paramilitary check post”.\textsuperscript{27} It is worthwhile to state that for the survival of the alliance of IMU it was pivotal for the organization to conduct such kind of attacks and prove itself for TTP’s to be a real strategic asset. Ashfaq Pervez Kiyani [the then Army Chief of Pakistan] in official briefing stated that “IMU is deeply struggling for its survival in different parts of the region and it can go to any extent.”\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{28} suicide-attack-claims-four-lives/

In this context, the Pakistan military decided that a military operation against IMU is inevitable because the organization is involved in carrying out lethal attacks and the killing of pro-government informers. IMU fighters have strongly maintained their presence in South and North Waziristan because of two reasons. Firstly, Tahir Yuldashev has charismatic leadership qualities. By his oratory skills he has gathered number of fighters driven by Jihadi doctrines. Secondly, as compared to other foreign militant outfits, IMU has developed strong local connections which consequently, not only enhanced its protection but also increased its influence in area. When Pakistan military launched a full scale ground offensive against IMU in erstwhile FATA along with US drone strikes, IMU as a retaliation started beheading of alleged government spies in South Waziristan. Since, the local were not in position to expel the members of IMU from the area because of latter’s stern punishments therefore, Punjabi Taliban were encouraged to counter the fighters of IMU in South Waziristan The strategy was successful in term of shifting IMU from South to North Waziristan. By 2014, IMU was limited only to North Waziristan and after launching a full-fledged military operation, Zerb-e-Azab, IMU was forced to flee to Afghanistan.

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Before being forced to flee to Afghanistan IMU has been deeply involved in terrorist activities in Pakistan. These activities ranged from suicide bombing to kidnapping for ransom. IMU is also claimed responsibilities of attacks on airports and military bases. Peshawar, Karachi, and Quetta airports were attacked by the militants of IMU. Militants who were involved in Mehran air base attack in Karachi were killed, and their photos were shared with media. From those photos and visuals many argued that they are Uzbek nationals by appearance.31

It is argued that IMU started its terrorist activities in Pakistan in 2007. Some security experts also contend that fighters of IMU actively participated in Lal Masjid’s episode. IMU members used to travel from Pakistan to Afghanistan under the cover of cloth merchants via different airports were largely suspected by security agencies. IMU members’ identification was challenging task for the security agencies of Pakistan because most of the militants of IMU could easily speak Pashtu and Urdu languages. In addition to this, they have constantly in contacts with the Quetta Shura of Baluchistan. Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani was briefed in 2008 that almost 8000 foreign militants were stationed in the tribal areas of Pakistan of which 4,800 belonged to IMU and most of them were Uzbek nationals.32 The militant landscape of Pakistan thus needs to be explored in connection with these various groups, including IMU. The presence of members of IMU was also doubted and claimed by some sources in Swat, Malakand and Bajaur as well during the conflict of Swat and Malakand.

Maulana Sufi Muhammad and his son in law are central characters in the conflict of Swat and Malakand. Sufi Muhammad, the head and founder of Tehreek-e-Nifazi Shariati Muhammadi (TNSM) recruited and sent thousands of militants to support the Afghan Taliban when the US attacked Afghanistan. However, he retreated to Pakistan where he was arrested by Pakistani law enforcement agencies. In 2007, his son in law Maulana Fazlulallah started preaching about Jihad in the valley of Swat through radio (that is why he was termed as ‘Radio Mullah’) 33. For strengthening and fomenting militant activities in the area Fazlullah closely collaborated with Maulvi Faqir Muhammad of Bajaur and declared their blatant support to Afghan Taliban. Fazlullah, despite this, also extended support to IMU and invited the later to become part of their

Shura (consultative assembly/cabinet). The physical appearance of the fighters of IMU, according to locals, was quite different and they always used to cover their faces so that outsider could not recognize them. It is also widely perceived by the people of Swat valley that hard punishments and executions were the policies of IMU so as to keep the people under psychological fear.\(^\text{34}\)

IMU also provided training to the militants of TNSM about the preparation of explosive devices and tactical methods for the employment of suicide bombing. It is undeniable fact that the influence of foreign groups on Fazlullah has been increased to the extent that he had to align himself with international Jihadi organizations like al-Qaeda. Resultantly, in 2007, Fazlullah joined the ranks of TTP and declared his allegiance with Bait Ullah Mehsud. Henceforth, policies were designed and directed to Fazlullah by Bait Ullah from Waziristan. It would not be wrong to say that peace agreement between Government of Pakistan and Fazlullah was sabotaged because of later allegiance with TTP. When Pakistan army launched offensive against TTP in Waziristan it directly affected peace deal of Swat which came into an end soon.\(^\text{35}\)

In 2008 and onward, IMU intensified its terrorist activities by attacking the political high-ups and buildings of law enforcement agencies. Afrasiyab Khattak was attacked in Peshawar (Province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). In this attack, fortunately, Khattak was saved but nearly 25 people were killed, and many were injured. In March 2010, Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) in Lahore was attacked by IMU in which 12 people were killed and almost 89 were badly wounded. In these attacks TTP supported IMU and were the part of retaliatory response to the government and security-managers. TTP spokesperson categorically stated that until Pakistan Army could stop military operation in erstwhile FATA and halt drone strike TTP with the support of other militant organization will continue to attack government installations.\(^\text{36}\) In March 2010, in response to twin suicide bomb blasts in which more than 50 people were killed Pakistani law enforcement agencies immediately started search operations. In these operations, dozens of suspects were arrested including Uzbeks who were four in number.\(^\text{40}\) Operational planning for Lahore suicide was coordinated and designed by Uzbek commander stationed in North Waziristan.\(^\text{37}\) On February 2012, during military operation in North Waziristan 16 militants of Turkmenistan, belonged to IMU, were killed. Leading Security and Afghan affairs expert Raheem Ullah Yousafzai argues that “Turkmen are also operating Pak-Afghan borderland because they cannot freely operate in Turkmenistan. They [Turkmen Militants] have joined the ranks of IMU because they wanted to topple the autocratic regime at home and replace it with Islamic one”.\(^\text{38}\)

In the years 2011 and 2012 series of attacks were carried out by IMU. In May 2011, Mehran Base of Pakistan Navy was attacked by nearly 15 militants who destroyed two P3-C Orion aircrafts

\(^{34}\) Zaidi, “Uzbek Militancy in Pakistan,” 9.

\(^{35}\) ibid


\(^{37}\) ibid

and a helicopter. All the militants were killed in counter operation. Most of the militants were Uzbeks. Similarly, in December 2012, Bacha Khan Airport Peshawar was attacked by TTP, however, security forces in a counter strike killed 10 militants of which five militants were suspected to be Uzbek nationals. In August 2012, Kamra Airbase was also attacked by the militants of IMU. Apart from this, the then Governor of Punjab Salman Taseer’s son, Shahbaz Taseer, was also kidnapped for ransom by IMU who later on, escaped from their custody in Afghanistan.

In June 2014, the movement, IMU, claimed responsibility for the attack on Jinnah International Airport Karachi. In this attack 34 people were killed. In an official website of IMU Usman Ghazi glorified the attack by stating,

“At 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 Mujahid who sold their lives for Jannah (heaven) became shaheed [martyr] as they were eager for it. Verily, all strength, praises and honor belongs to Allah.”

In addition to this, in August 2014, a dozen of militants of IMU tried to enter the Quetta Airbase but all were killed by the security forces. Commander of the Southern Command Lt. Gen. Nasir Khan Janjua, Stated in his official statement that terrorists wanted to enter into airbase but they were successfully encountered. All installations have been saved and all militants were killed by security forces.” Since, the activities of the foreign militants have been intensifying; therefore, military operations were launched without any discrimination. Operation Zerb-e-Azab was one such military operation to hunt down the militants including IMU. The operation impelled IMU to flee back to Afghanistan.

Currently, IMU is active in Northern Afghanistan and the border’s areas of Tajikistan. It is reported, that IMU operates in two groups. The splinter group under the leadership of Usman Ghazi has extended allegiance to IS (Daesh) while the other one is working still in close collaboration with al-Qaeda. In Pakistan, the movement has no ‘active’ presence now. However, like other militants, owing to the intensity and lethality of earlier attacks, the resurgence of IMU in future

cannot be underestimated. Moreover, as the Pakistani state apparatus and the military has been successful for the last few years in limiting these activities and claiming to be controlling the situation, the present strategies and activities needs to be more intense and focused as to stop the rise of militants including IMU again in Pakistan.

Conclusion

In the so called ‘war on terror’ Pakistan has been facing daunting challenges. The presence and lethal activities of militants especially from transnational groups has been one such formidable challenge. In this context, the growing presence of Islamic movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in Pakistan and the groups close affiliation with local militant groups which has compounded/worsened the security landscape of Pakistan is the focus of this present study. The present research has elaborated the genesis, objectives, and activities in Uzbekistan, neighboring states, and the central Asian regions. Moreover, in the same section, the study discussed the connection of IMU with other militant groups. This exploration was furthered to the Pakistani context and a detail was provided regarding the lethal activities of IMU in Pakistan before the ‘successful’ military operations of security forces of Pakistan against the group in tribal and urban areas of Pakistan. It is argued that at present IMU has no active presence in Pakistan. However, the future course of the country will highly depend the strategies of Pakistani statute apparatus as IMU has now been more dangerous because of its internal split and affiliation of one group with ISIS and inclination towards al-Qaeda of other group. Policymakers and security-mangers of Pakistan shall focus these patterns.

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