

# Pakistan: Adjusting Relations with the Taliban Under U.S. Pressure

February 11, 2008 | 1710 GMT

## Summary

Mansour Dadullah, a top Taliban commander, and several of his comrades were captured Feb. 11 in Pakistan's Balochistan province. Conflicting reports say that either Dadullah died in the attack, or he died from injuries later, or he was critically wounded but still alive. Dadullah's removal from the scene is not necessarily a major blow to the Afghan Taliban, but it is a chance for Pakistan to display its own forces' progress against jihadists.

## Analysis

Pakistani security forces captured Mansour Dadullah, a top Taliban commander, with several of his comrades Feb. 11 in the northwestern Pashtun corridor of Balochistan province. There are several accounts of how the group was captured; some say authorities had intelligence reports that the militants were hiding in a house in the village of Gowal Ismail Zai, while others say Dadullah and his men were challenged as they were crossing the border into Pakistan from Afghanistan at the Gaddal Post in the town of Qila Saifullah in the Zhob district. There also are conflicting reports on Dadullah's fate; some say he was killed in the operation, others say he died while en route to a hospital and still others say he is alive but critically wounded.

Dadullah recently succeeded his brother, Taliban field commander Mullah Dadullah, who was killed in a [May 2007 airstrike](#) in Afghanistan. Unlike his elder brother, Mansour does not have a reputation as a major Taliban commander; in fact, in late December he reportedly was "disciplined" by Taliban leader [Mullah Omar](#) for engaging in unauthorized negotiations. His removal from the battlefield, therefore, does not constitute a major blow to the insurgency in Afghanistan but it is a way for Pakistan — which is under tremendous pressure from Washington to agree to [overt U.S. military operations](#) on its soil — to try and demonstrate that its own forces are making progress against the jihadists.

Mansour's arrest — which comes as the Pakistani army's Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee chairman, Gen. Tariq Majeed, is reportedly slated to arrive in the United States for a nine-day visit — is the latest in a string of incidents and statements that seem to indicate Islamabad's response to the pressure from Washington.

- On Jan. 28, senior al Qaeda prime operative [Abu Laith al-Libi](#) was killed in a U.S. Predator airstrike in the North Waziristan region.
- On Feb. 8, an unnamed senior U.S. official told Reuters that the apex leadership of al Qaeda and the Taliban is in Pakistan. The official reportedly said, "Just as Mullah Omar is giving strategic direction for the Taliban from Quetta, al Qaeda senior leadership is in [Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas] doing its planning." This statement came during U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Adm. Michael Mullen's visit to Islamabad to meet with senior Pakistani army officials on counterterrorism issues.
- On Feb. 9, a Pakistani Foreign Ministry spokesman rejected the U.S. claim as baseless, saying that if the United States had intelligence on the jihadist leaders' whereabouts, it should share it with Islamabad rather than talking to the media.
- On Feb. 10, two separate Taliban spokesmen issued statements rejecting the Feb. 8 U.S. claim that Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar are in Pakistan. One spokesman told the Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press that Mullah Omar was not in Pakistan and that such claims were preparing the ground for a military operation in the concerned area. Elsewhere, the other spokesman told Agence France-Presse that Mullah Omar was not in Pakistan, but in Afghanistan leading the fight against Western forces.

## TALIBAN COUNTRY



Interestingly, the Taliban figures' statements and the Pakistani government's statements came out a day apart and say the same thing. From an operational security perspective, it is not in the Taliban's interest to say where their leaders are. But such statements do serve Pakistan's interests, and it is likely that [Pakistani channels](#) fed these statements into the media stream.

Mansour's arrest also is another example of Islamabad giving up another well-known jihadist figure whose actions they may have been turning a blind eye to. Islamabad is trying to counter the notion that it distinguishes

between good Taliban (those operating in Afghanistan) and [bad Taliban](#) (those who are waging war on Islamabad). The reports saying that he was killed in an encounter while crossing the border are designed to underscore the fact that Taliban leaders are actually based in Afghanistan and only rarely cross into Pakistan. The Associated Press quoted Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid as saying that though Mansour was still part of the Taliban movement, he was no longer an operational commander in southern Afghanistan. Mujahid added that he had no comments to make about Mansour's reported capture. It is likely that Mansour was among the Taliban figures with [close ties to Pakistan](#), which is why Mullah Omar stripped him of his leadership position. But because he no longer played a key role in the insurgency in Afghanistan, the Pakistanis no longer had much use for him, and thus Mansour was expendable.

Because Mansour reportedly resided in a facility in more or less the same area Washington has identified as Mullah Omar's whereabouts, Washington will only increase pressure on the Pakistanis. A year ago, Stratfor triangulated [Mullah Omar's likely location](#) as between Quetta and the southern tip of the tribal belt. A senior Pakistani Taliban leader, [Abdullah Mehsud](#), also was killed in a shootout in the same area. While the hunt for al Qaeda is heating up in Pakistan's tribal badlands, the fight against the Afghan Taliban will take place in the Pashtun corridor in northwestern Balochistan.