



## Disclaimer

Names of people or places / bases have been omitted or altered for operational security and to protect identity of the people. Details of tactics that are discussed are not unique to Pakistani Special Forces. In case of any clarifications please contact the author directly. The interview took place in August time in 2014.

### Introduction:

This is the interview of a serving SSG officer. It was conducted over multiple sittings and the SSG commando was kind enough to go into detail about their working and their recent operations. The questions are asked for the benefit of the readers where an opinion or further information was needed. Apart from that the narration is continues and uninterrupted.

Sincerely: Irfan Baloch – Pakistan Defence Counterinsurgency Expert.

Horus – Editor and Pakistan Defence Administrator

### List of terms and acronyms

4GW = 4th generation warfare

Aabpara = The place of ISI HQ in Islamabad

BLA = Balochistan Liberation Army

BOO = Base of Operation

C3= Command, Control and Communication



**CAS=Close Air Support**

**COM = Communication**

**COMINT = Communication Intelligence**

**Crypt-Analysis= decipher intercepted enemy messages**

**CTC = Counter Terrorism Cell**

**CTR= Close Target Reconnaissance**

**HALO= High Altitude Low Opening (parachuting)**

**HTV= High Value Target**

**HUMINT= Human Intelligence**

**IED= Improvised Explosive Device**

**ICD = Imitative Communication Deception (misleading the enemy)**

**IDP= Internally Displaced People**

**IMU= Islamic movement of Uzbekistan**  
**Intel = Intelligence**



**IRT= Infrared Thermography**  
**ISI= Inter Services Intelligence**

**JSIB = Joint Signal Intelligence Bureau**

**LIC= Low Intensity Conflict**

**LMG= Light Machine Gun**

**MOUT= Military Operation in Urban Terrain**

**NVG=Night Vision Goggles**

**NW / SW = North Waziristan / South Waziristan (tribal agencies of Pakistan)**

**Ops & Coms = Operations & communication**

**RDF= Radio/ Radar Direction Finding**

**SMS= Small message service ( mobile text messaging)**

**SIG = Signal**

**SIGINT = Signals Intelligence**

**SOP = Standard Operating Procedure**



**SSG = Special Services Group**

***TTP = Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan***

**Zarb e Azb = Name of Pak Military operation against Taliban meaning decisive strike**



**Please give us the background of your operation**

The particulars of what I am going to discuss are based on our operation in two locations which was conducted

simultaneously I will of course not comment on sensitive or need to know material. The operation against the terrorists is ongoing in the airwaves and intelligence gathering in the traditional methods.



Intelligence community is always on the lookout for any leads from the terrorist communications that are being monitored. Coming to the background, the intercepts from terrorist chatter picked up by JSIB via SIGINT and the pattern of movement observed through our own HUMINT suggested that the miscreants were relocating their local BOO out of the agency in order to avoid Pakistan military's NW operation. Also there were intercepts about potential attacks on IDP camps and military outposts. We used all available assets in the air, on the ground, behind coms etc. to filter out credible leads from ICD.

What was so special about those intercepts? Which made the military to take this mission?

We have been fighting the miscreants for over a decade now so we have picked up pattern of their modes operandi. Although they are very adaptive and show exceptional skills in concealing their logistics, ops & Coms but now and then they do slip up and make mistakes, it's only human nature that due to battle fatigue, stress, health issues and exhaustion one can lose concentration or become more confident than necessary. Through

domestic & foreign Intel collaboration we had leads that some HVT was/ were possibly trapped in the Zarb e Azb operational area. Some terrorists had missed the ride to Afghanistan by chance or choice.

And that's what we were waiting for. JSIB personnel have patience to work for hours & listen to radio chatter and Analyze previously gathered data & live feed from HUMINT & COMINT. They also have experience and the equipment at their disposal to pick up or intercept such chatter, Analyze it and pass it on for further analysis and / or cross check it with HUMINT if the intercept quality & content warrants it. Now I am not going to spell out how we process the intelligence and what specific tools & methods we use but in short it's a mix of technology and people on the ground that weeds out clutter from actionable Intel and if needed perform cryptanalysis to work out the meaning and then our command decides what action to take. This can be like, continue observing, capture or eliminate the target.

How do they react when they can't fight or run?



The hardcore terrorists are very much sure about their cause so they always give a full fight. In case of failing to run or blowing themselves up to avoid capture, their leaders simply surrender and don't try anything to get hurt as if self-preservation mod kicks in.

Why is that? Why sudden desire for self-preservation? Is it because they know they will walk out free from the Pakistani courts?

they might appear very smug and condescending in their videos but when they are captured or killed (the later mostly because they have managed to reoffend) then they look miserable and any untrained person would breakdown with emotions & confuse them as innocent civilians but we from firsthand experience know what these people are capable of.

This is not what I asked, why did you say you prefer killing them to negate their ability to reoffend? Are you blaming our justice system?

This is a political statement. I am a soldier. I won't respond to a loaded question.

Aabpara still has to screen the contents of this interview so what I can say is this war can't be won through military power alone, we are engaged in an asymmetric warfare with a highly motivated and resourceful enemy that enjoys support from the cross section of the society and some personalities that belong to institutions we call pillars of state. We need the help of general public to succeed in this war.

So you are saying people in media, politics and judiciary are playing in the hands of the terrorists by mistake or by choice?

This I leave with you and the readers to decide.

How was the target identified? Was it by chance or a result of a long intelligence operation?

Military command was expecting the likely trail the Terrorist leadership was going to take once the news of the Operation Zarb e Azb was out. Normally we won't pursue them if they cross the border into Afghanistan.

Normally? Can you please explain?



It is important that Afghans sort out their presidential elections issue themselves and we don't stand blamed by either of the losing candidate & their Intelligence chief for the instability in their country. For example sending our teams across the border after BLA & TTP will be used against us saying we are meddling into their affairs and causing terrorism. The Haqqani network related blames are always ready on their desks whether or not that group is involved in anything against the Afghan regime. Therefore we prefer to use the diplomatic route to convince them to stop hosting certain guests in Kunar and Nuristan. COAS has personally passed this message to Afghan ambassador in case you have seen the news. Hence hot pursuit is usually avoided.

#### So there are exceptions?

Perhaps, when terrorists might have found out that being in Afghanistan didn't mean they were out of reach. The airstrike on Dangman in Kunar province is one such example. Otherwise our artillery strikes have sufficed and forced them to go deeper inside Afghanistan.

#### What gave away the target location which lead to his capture?

Normally they become very quiet before any major strike. It's a very fundamental SOP of any worthy adversary to avoid any SIG or COM leak that would give away his location or mission at a very critical moment.

Also, when they are restricted from movement than their countermeasures against our COMINT and SIGINT are not that effective because they are forced to stay in same location while communicating with each other. One such reason is ongoing military sweep and drone surveillance which prevents their free movement.

They are very resourceful and technically savvy. The hardware retrieved from raids and firefights contains military grade gear which is not available in open market. This suggests either they have very good contacts with international black-market or with a state other than Afghanistan which is very thorough in keeping its support a secret.



Normally they use spread spectrum techniques and directional antennas with a narrow beam of transmission to avoid our RDF but repeatedly having to use same location to communicate even for a few times increases the chances for our RDF to catch them. Since any wireless com unit gives away a radio frequency out of its oscillators so there is a chance for persistent RDF operators to locate them.

You mentioned international agencies, are you suggesting the presence of CIA field offices inside Pakistan?

Such question is beyond the scope of what we are talking about so a definite yes or no is not possible. Shamsi airbase was used as a CIA drones base in the past. There is nothing unique about it. Specifics are needed to know. My team and I only care about what Intel we get and how reliable it is to make use of it.

How CTC is monitoring mobile calls into and out of Pakistan?

in Pakistan the deal with all mobile network providers is that every voice messaging, SMS and calls are routed

through CTC within our JSIB and a software provided by our NATO partners activates when certain numbers or networks in certain areas are used and the entire call is automatically recorded once the voice recognition software goes through the database of the known big players and prompts a match and the operators are notified. Normally the intercepts are short and cryptic but they giveaway enough traces and pieces of Intel that help in building the bigger picture. One of the hallmarks of ISI is its very strong HUMINT which the COMINT and SIGINT cannot replace, they are good force multipliers but the good old methods of snooping and observing have been proven and passed the test of time.

So a call was intercepted which helped us to identify a suspected safe house in the borders of NW and SW agencies and initial surveillance identified occupants of that place performing the lookout and counter surveillance suggesting that place was part of some major terrorist plot in near future.

SO what events led the target to leave NW and head to the south in WANA?





Probably many, the risk of being caught in the ground sweep. The need to reestablish the COM Channels within the terrorist command structure somewhere outside of the operation zone. because it was impossible to stay silent for too long in Mir Ali and Miran shah and its surroundings or to plan for any future major attack on Pakistan.

Their movement is very meticulous. They generously use tunnels which pretty much solve their problem of being detected. Also they move in alternating phases and time intervals as a counter surveillance measure.

Being a small decentralized group with a local support as a lookout. It's very easy for them to meld into locals and environment. The difference this time was that they were tagged by our multiple assets and tip offs from the pro government tribesmen in the area also contributed to the decision to go ahead with the Operation. Shakai was one of the two potential places where the important terrorist leaders & trainers were expected to hide.

We also picked up intelligence that the terrorists might head towards Hassu Khel before trying to sneak into settled areas of KPK via Bannu or cross over into Afghanistan near Miran Shah. The night time airborne surveillance through IRT picked up terrorist movement in the suspected compounds that were abandoned by the tribesmen some time ago. So further reconnaissance through air and ground confirmed a complex in Zangal Khel as yet another likely place where all or some of the terrorist leadership was expected to retreat or assemble before a major attack on our outposts or bases.

Can you explain further about the air surveillance and IRT? Do you mean use of Pakistani UAV drones reconnaissance or the C-130s that are equipped with night vision and thermal imaging equipment for night missions?

Yes such capability is available in multiple platforms but details are classified

How did this new information about another base in South affect your operation?



This presented us with a challenge on many fronts to plan for logistics involved and to assemble a strike force to covertly infiltrate in a hostile terrain with time constraints due to small window of opportunity. Badly planned & badly executed operations with inaccurate intelligence result in failure and loss of life.

Another call to make was which place to hit out of the two and whether hitting a wrong place meant losing an opportunity of capturing the important terrorist after putting so much effort and people's lives in danger. There was no doubt that if our HVT was on the other location then he was going to find out immediately about our operation and escape.

Therefore safe bet was to assemble two teams for each location but it meant considerable planning, coordination, logistics though effective C3 or command control and communication. Since the nature of the operation was in closed confines and in potentially hostile territory with unknown number of enemy so personnel best suited for such operation were needed. So people were pooled from ISI, SSG and FC.

For the benefit of readers please explain why FC was selected & how its personnel were expected to keep up with SSG?

FC saw major transformation since the time of IGFC Gen Tariq Khan & has had training from SSG and American Green Berets in COIN and CBQ, Originally a specialist 400 man strong commando unit was raised for first time as early as 2010 that has intense training of about 7 to 8 months, they also have the added advantage of local knowledge as well hence they have been instrumental in capturing some high value Al Qaeda terrorists and have participated in operations where there were American Embed units were involved as well.

Please take us through the details about people that took part in the operation& explain why ISI personnel were needed?

Secrecy and surprise was the key for this operation so the team members were segregated from the rest of the base personnel and advised the obvious which was to keep the operational talk strictly within their teams.



This combination is not unusual because ISI field agents get special weapons & hand to hand combat training some also have served in SSG before returning back to their units. Agents & personnel from Special Forces are the ones who conduct covert operations. Interdepartmental transfers are not unique to Pakistan military. And that's the nature of our field work which primarily relies on stealth and observation and striking with maximum & decisive force in a very short period of time.

ISI is our eyes and ears they identify the target provide the intelligence and we bring the firepower. The ISI personnel themselves have CBQ training including firearms & Hand to Hand combat so in cases like capturing KSM (Khalid Sheikh Mehmood AQ master mind) sometimes they conduct the operations themselves in rest of Pakistan.

So our task force was divided into 2 small task forces and the mix consisted of ISI agents, commandos from FC and SSG personnel. Beyond this specific operation, SSG personnel are embedded with the regular forces conducting the bigger NW operation at the moment.

For each group taking part in this mission we had planned to have 2 to 3 assault teams of 5 to 7 people each and 2 were ISI officers with SSG background.

We had 3 sniper teams for each group consisting of spotter and shooter with an exception of a lone sniper making a single member team and a 7 member team armed with mortar and LMG. In total we were a platoon size force. After selecting the personnel we were designated our own area and we kept to ourselves and actual mission was only shared with the team in later stages.

Is it possible to share what kind of gear and weapons did the strike force have?

There was nothing unusual about the gear. We were to maintain stealth from the point of our arriving, moving and waiting at the target area. Therefore all assault teams had weapons with suppressors consisting of P90 & M4, type 56 assault rifles and carbines. The side arms also had suppressors to maintain stealth as long as possible and take out the guard dogs. The single sniper I mentioned earlier was closest compared to the other 2 sniper teams. His final



location was round about 400 meters from the target safe house so he had a PSR -90 with suppressor due to his proximity to the target area and he was Para dropped there one day before everyone to carry out the initial CTR.

The other sniper teams were armed with Barrett M82, spotter scopes and Styr SSG 69. IR beacons for Combat identification & NVGs. they also carried type 56 as their secondary backup weapons. there was a 7 member team with 60MM mortar and MG 1A3 and RPGs. Assault teams had stun grenades and fragmentation grenades as well as shaped charges for dynamic entry and room clearance if the situation required.

Apart from that everyone had the field rations, water canteens, first aid kits, heavy bandages & pain suppressors like morphine in their individual trauma kits. A dedicated medic might have kits including oils & extractor pumps for stings and bites from critters, cutting tools and water purification pills since we were going to be in the field for few days and possibly on our own. This is in short called our SERE kit (survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape). Kits are always mission specific and will

vary depending on the area of operation which maybe Land or sea based or its nature like recc, patrol or direct action.

What size of target area was there needing such large force backed up with snipers, MG & mortar teams?

Because of this new intelligence now we had two areas under consideration separated by over 100 km from each other in South and North Waziristan in the South, the span of our TAI was roughly 10 Sq. Km in Shakai valley surrounded by Gomal river. Our HVT was expected to use its safe house in order to wait out the operation or cross over to Afghanistan via WANA or go north from Makin towards Hassu Khel to meld with thousands of IDPs heading towards Bannu or cross over to Khost in Afghanistan. This was second TAI which was roughly 50 Sq. Km divided by Tochi River. If the militants ran towards that area then our HVT was expected to use its safe house in a place called Zanghal Khel near Hassu Khel before deciding to dash towards Bannu or cross over to Khost in Afghanistan



our high altitude reconnaissance during day and night picked up a presence of people in excess of 20 to 30 in 2 or 3 days prior to the operation which suggested as if it was an assembly area before some major attack on our forces in Bannu or Miran Shah or they were just the advance party securing the area before the arrival of their VIP and our HVT.

Since the local population had mostly left the area so the TTP was spotted as an oddity thanks to the air surveillance. TTP had advantage as well because other houses in close proximity, trees, bushes and fields along with terrain and topography of the area presented excellent cover and concealment to not only fend off any attack but also hide a big force too and the miscreants were estimated to be between 50 to 80 in total in both areas. it was a reminder to our LIC in Swat valley with the exception that there were no civilians in the vicinity but houses and alleyways added to complexity we faced during our operations in buildup areas in Swat typical of a MOUT military operation in urban terrain.

Our HUMINT was secretly tracking & reporting back movement of people

around Makin where our HVT was expected to be holed in and at approaches to Shakai where he was expected to go. We were getting real time intelligence feeds about suspected TTP movement and any unexpected diversions while we were finalizing our task force and mission details. Once the inhabitants of the safe house and their sentries tightened up their routines then we knew that time to decide and act was close to nab the target in Shakai.

Our ongoing operation had made all other routes less attractive so in order to avoid a direct engagement with military which was backed up with armor, gunships and PAF strikes at a call's notice, the TTP element we were tracking had to head for one of the two safe houses where we planned to ambush the enemy.

In case they headed north, did they not have to cross through Miran Shah for Afghanistan? Which has heavy military presence?

That's correct their options were limited and they sensed that military was in hot pursuit. Miran Shah and its suburbs have heavy military presence due to ongoing



operation. There was a risk that terrorists might try to meld into thousands of IDPs that were fleeing the area due to the operation, but our HVT had to avoid Bannu because of the check posts setup to register and identify the IDPs and all travelers and that area also has constant airborne and ground surveillance that has captured some terrorists who have tried to escape into settled areas. So initial reports suggested maybe movement to the north was to fool the units in pursuit on the wrong track.

Later on, through interrogations of captured terrorists we found out that TTP move to a place between Hassu Khel and Zanghal Khel in the North Waziristan was not a decoy. Their primary fighters went there to attack the flanks of military units deployed near Bannu and IDP camps.

Since the NW operation, we have more willing tribesmen coming forward to flush out the TTP in the area and our forces have coordinated search and destroy operations with them. This is helping our troops in successful raids and avoiding ambushes. An unrelated military sweep was already taking place along Makin which worked out in a way that the terrorists had to

make a move and that suited us well because we had already identified. We allowed some information to "leak" suggesting that some parts of Makin were going to get comprehensive search and that rumor was helped by military presence in the area. The gambit worked and eventually within a day we had the desired effect and our HUMINT close to the terrorists confirmed that they were making their way towards the south.

#### How did they make their moves?

The direct journey by a motorized transport is up to 2 or more hours from Makin to Hassu Khel and to Shakai from Makin its roundabout less than 2 hours, but they avoid a direct and one mode of transport. so they walk, use tunnels, mules and pickup trucks in different phases, they stop and they wait, they are very paranoid and always lay in traps and look outs to identify any covert pursuit and they kill the locals and even their own lower tier fighters for suspicion of spying.

And since this time they thought they were being pursued so they setup an ambush before Razmak just after crossing the Tank Zam River along a narrow and



slow uphill road that was flanked by small hills and enough growth to conceal a considerable size of force. a party of approximately 50 or so Taliban setup an ambush with road side IED's and stationed their men on either side of the hill tops most probably with sniper rifles, RPGs and machine guns to stall or destroy incoming army units. While their high value contingent was to continue its escape to the safe area this Intel was passed on to the field HQ thanks once again to our assets in that part of the area. Encrypted messages were relied to all forces in the area to avoid that chokepoint until the ambushing terrorists were neutralized. Gunships were called in to take them out.

Tell us about the makeup of the enemy forces that your task force came across in both areas.

There were some high ranking members of Al Qaeda and our HVT was a high ranking bomb expert and trainer. There were some Uzbek members belonging to IMU as well and rest was mostly TTP umbrella organization consisting of Lashkar Jhangvi and Ghazi force personnel. All these people have taken part in fights against the military forces & other tribal militias opposed to them. Both Ghazi force and Lashkar Jhangvi members are also routinely involved in killing members of Shia community in tribal agencies and rest of Pakistan. These were all front line troops or mujahids of TTP and Al Qaeda and then there were Fedayeen level terrorists that are mostly young with average age group of 15 to 17. In case of a fire fight these boys sacrifice their lives to help their more experienced mujahids and emirs to run away. Fedayeen will charge the positions of their enemies on bomb laden vehicles or on foot with suicide vests and blow themselves up or will choose a







fortified position and will fire with heavy machine guns & RGPs and giving the chance to their senior colleagues to escape while the military is pinned down under

the suppressive fire. Their mission normally is to inflict heavy casualties before dying.



Take us through the launch of the operation in both areas

Once the people for this operation were selected we had series of meetings on the team structure and size, who was going where and when, how to approach the target, our infiltration points our way points leading to exfiltration and all contingencies that are possible in a mission like this. Layout of the target building was not known so a traditional tribal house layout was drawn and assault was planned with that in mind.

The strike towards Hassu Khel was expected to be difficult one due to higher number of armed TTP members so we had to surprise them and bring much more

Firepower to defeat them so our MG and mortar team was selected to provide suppressive fire when the assault went dynamic. We wanted to capture the ring leaders alive so all this all effort was made in order to retrieve any intelligence. Strike from PAF jets or Gunships were on standby in case our mission failed.

The task force was divided into the two groups comprising of the assault and sniper teams and then we independently





went through the mission specifics for our target areas. I was to command the Shakai team and another SSG major was commanding the Zanghal Khel team. We synchronized our watches, ran through ex-filtration points, the coded messages about mission status and alternate routes in case of any problems. Both groups were to reach the designated target areas in the dark and wait out the day till the dusk and launch the operation at the time most suitable to us after our final CTR was done. Ideally we were going to be awaiting the arrival of HTV at one of these 2 locations and ambush him.

Chances were that our Al Qaeda HVT was already at Zanghal Khel or was to arrive at Shakai in following few days. Terrorist leadership hardly meets up in person and avoids large gathering of higher ranking members in one place so there was a chance that if AQ leader was in Shakai then the TTP leader would be in Zanghal Khel area finalizing their own strike on Bannu or Miran Shah. Striking both places simultaneously was prudent because the terrorists in the other place were sure to leave the area if the word reached them and their place was not attacked in time.

Before heading to our individual destinations we assembled together one last time and wished good luck to each other before being airlifted. The snipers took the lead to gather intelligence and act as scouts so they left 4 hours ahead of the assault teams and reached the targets by midnight. The single sniper in our group for Shakai was Para dropped from high altitude at an earlier night about 2 km from the target he is HALO qualified. He provided real time intelligence from that location which helped us to adjust our approach and drop off points. The other two sniper teams were dropped 10 miles away from target behind cliffs to mask the Huey noise. The helicopter didn't stay for more than 5 minutes in the area and left immediately. We couldn't afford to give away our presence too early and were not taking any chances.

There was also the consideration of US drones in the area and Americans were informed that our forces were conducting operations in the area so they were to avoid any engagement without consulting us.



We roped down from Mi17 behind the cliffs near Mazdak about 12 miles away from the target at the different drop off point to avoid any chance discovery. That area is uninhabited, and the local topography is marked with ridges, small hills and sudden ditches dotted with trees and bushes and to keep our arrival secret and concealed from a chance discovery, our drop zone was different.

The Hassu Khel group followed the same but more rigorous drill to reach the target. Their teams were landed 8 or 9 km off their target location in an area that is our air corridor of all hellebore activities for the FATA operations to mask their arrival and then they trekked and had to avoid

the IDPs and used mules, unmarked civilian transport and walked in the wilderness avoiding tribal settlements and roads. Part of their journey was helped by our friendly local militia that provided us with their motor transport and mules without any clue about our intended direct and final destination. They travelled in small packs of 4 to 5 people to avoid detection and used different approaches during their journey.

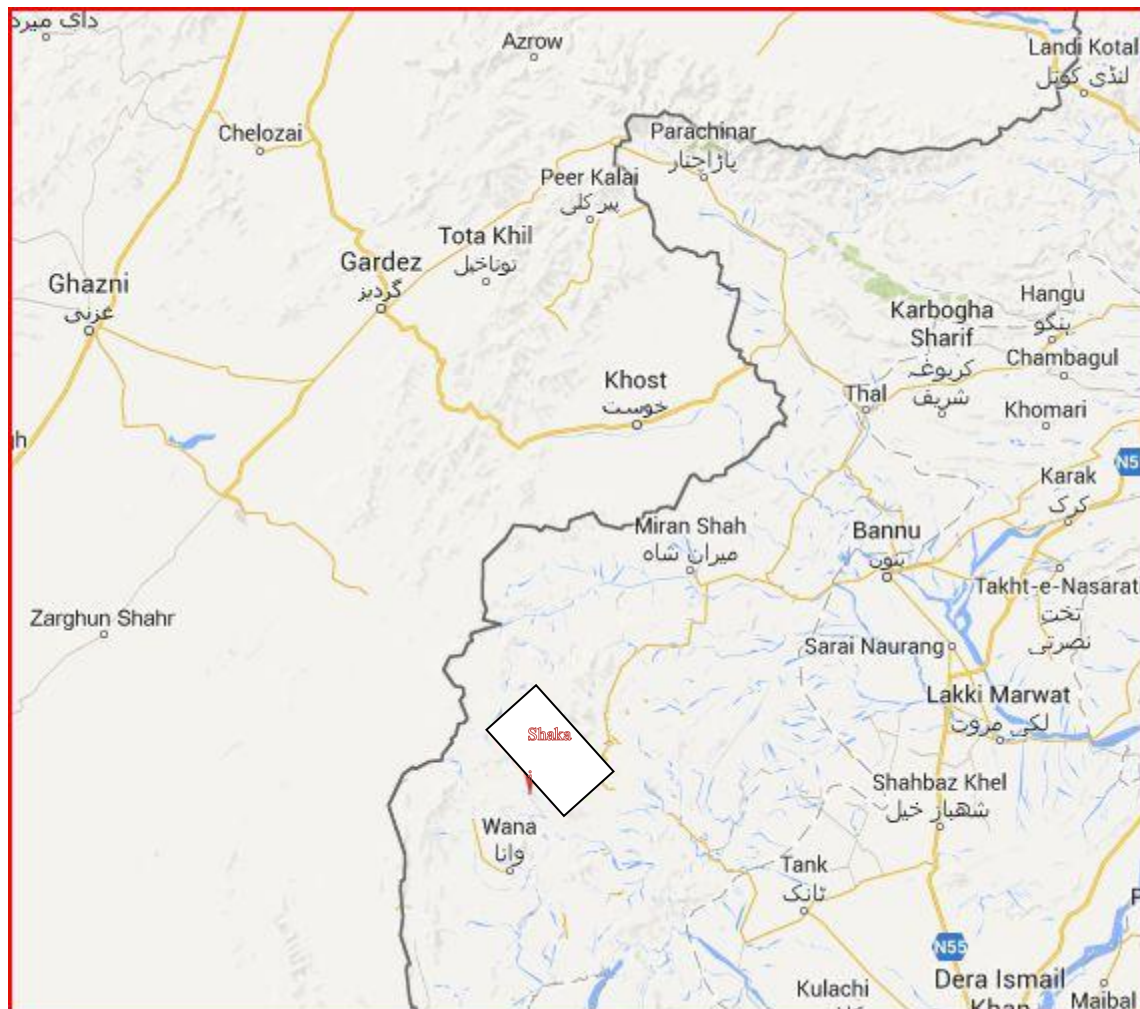
The Hassu Khel group confirmed HQ about reaching the target before dawn. After approaching the target location the platoon size force hid in the thick vegetation around the compound before the assault. The MG and Morton team were with the sniper teams covering the compound from 3 locations.

Force consisted of 3 assault teams with 2 flanking the compound and third in reserve & serve as a lookout against any counter attack from surrounding areas. In Shakai valley we all were to walk all night and reach near target before dawn and find suitable location to conceal ourselves until we were all in position and our HVT location was confirmed. Although it was moonless night with some cloud



cover as well but we still avoided breaking the skyline, stayed away from treaded routes and river bank just in case those areas were under surveillance. Radio communication was kept to minimum except exchanging confirmations of our reaching target areas. We silently but swiftly treaded our ways through the uneven path that gradually descended into the valley. The help of NAV equipment and sniper teams location ensured that we

were able to get in position well before dawn in about 4 hours long march. We didn't encounter anyone during our approach to the target and there was nothing suspicious. Our NVG only picked Up some wildlife like rodents and wild hogs and we reached the target vicinity without any incident.





After finding suitable locations about 600 meters away from the target to rest and conceal ourselves we performed last CTR and noticed 5 sentries around and on top of the target building complex with at least 3 always on the lookout on the roofs. At least 2 of them also appeared to have scoped rifles. The area inside the boundary walls was 4 thousand sq. yards covered with corn and vegetable fields. The approach to the compound was through a dried out bank of a stream. We had setup our sniper positions across the bank at elevations around the target covering all angles and approaches there was plenty of natural cover available through bushes, rock and trees. Our first sniper had communicated the usual traffic coming and going from the compound and identified 2 underground tunnels on the North West and south west of the compound.

The prominent structure in the middle of the compound was double story with a covered area of about 1000 Sq. yard. And we could hear some dogs barking too and our sniper team confirmed a pack of 4 guard dogs inside the compound that did come out with some people at the boundary wall. They were occasionally

seen patrolling boundaries of the inner buildings without any set pattern. Thankfully the wind direction was eastward from the compound to us otherwise the dogs were sure to pick up our scent, we were extra careful and used empty water bottles for urination or covered it immediately with dirt to kill the scent from travelling any further. In the wilderness the scent of urine can travel for few hundred meters and can be picked up by trained people and dogs have even more sensitive nose.

Our 3 sniper teams were flanking the compound from 3 directions and were covering the front and the rear of the compound and the entry spot of our 2 assault teams were covered by at least 2 snipers from 2 locations at any given time. Our sniper teams reported up to 15 people wondering inside the compound during the day. We prioritized the guard dogs and the sentries as our first targets to neutralize silently to maintain our stealth and element of surprise by preventing the terrorists any means of early warning once the firefight started. Our assault teams and the snipers were equipped with powerful spotter scopes and digital cameras to ID our target if he arrived during the day. The



snipers had good overall view of the compound inside its walls and around its entrances to get a clear and closer look of our target. their responsibility was to provide cover to assault teams during the fighting inside the compound and also during the exfiltration to the pickup point, neutralize all threats and provide suppressive fire if needed.

The hours went by slowly and it was a waiting game and test of patience and concentration. The ETA of the HTV was unknown and as per our ISI personnel accompanying us in the mission, it was expected any time from now. The approach to the compound in Shakai dotted with vegetables fields and dried up stream beds leading to Gomal River and

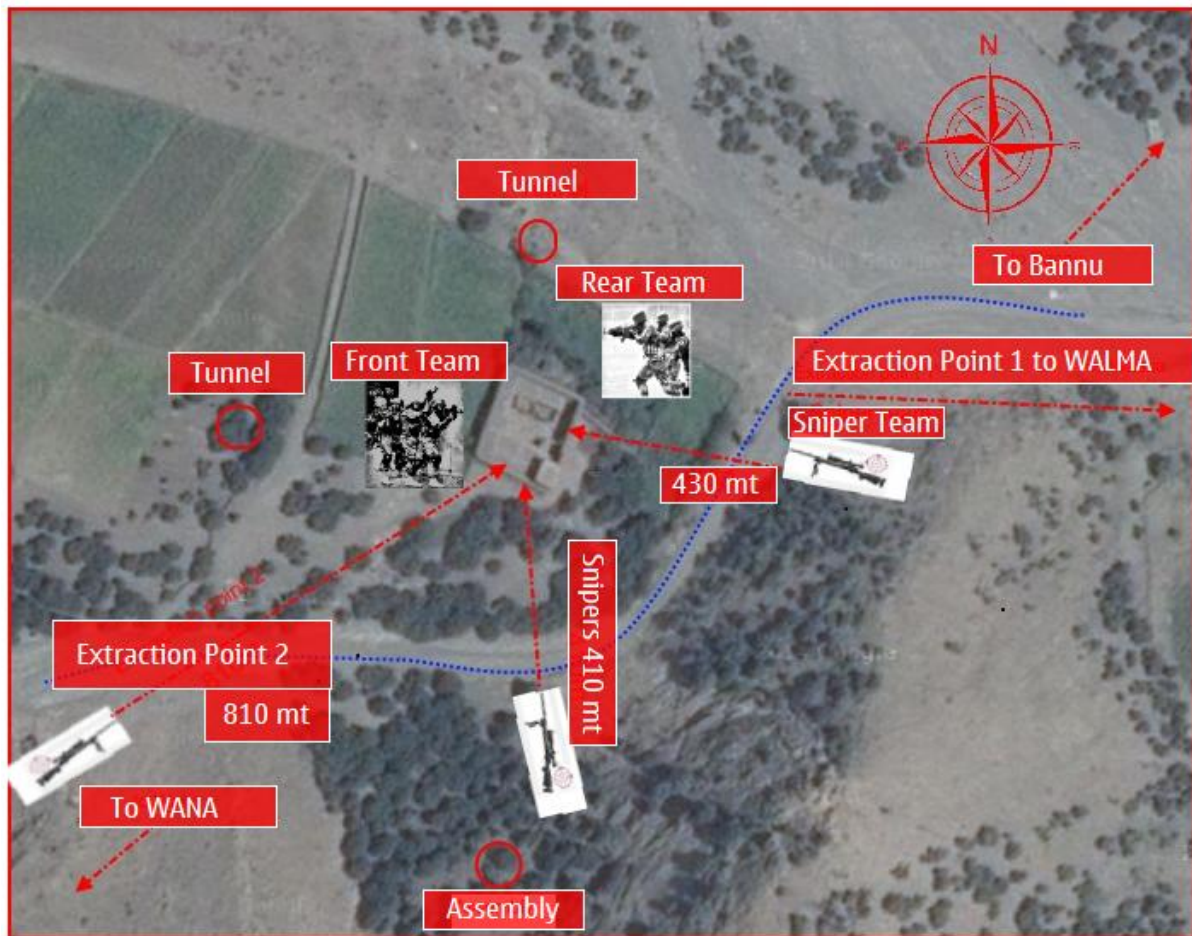
had tracks of mini trucks and 4 x4 vehicles.

At about noon and evening some vehicles did arrive but only had one or two occupants that didn't match our targets. It seemed that either the target had sensed danger and cancelled his trip or was smart not to travel during the day. There was a risk that this operation might be abandoned in case our target didn't turn up like few times before.

Nothing happened till late night.

Eventually 2 Toyota double cabins were picked up by our sniper on the northern side they were coming down from north east and then they made a turn towards the compound we got the signal and were ready to launch our assault which was to start with taking out the terrorists on the lookout.





As soon as the north end sniper team neutralized the 3 sentries, we scaled the walls and landed inside the compound from 2 directions immediately concealing ourselves behind the internal structures of the compound that consisted of a larger building in the middle and smaller single or 2 room sheds, lavatories and barns near the walls containing vehicles, farm harvest and some cattle. The main building had

some lighting on the front side but rest of the compound was in pitch darkness. Near the front big container sized electric generator was running and its loud noise was very helpful in masking sounds from our movement and the sniper fire from distance.

We took positions near the entrance in the shadows of the small partition walls of the garages used as storage of vehicles and



farming equipment. The engines of the newly arrived Toyota double cabins were still running near the giant front gates. The plan was to assault the guests and the hosts while they were settling inside the main residence. This was the best time while the attention of everyone inside the compound was diverted for few minutes leaving only the sentries in the crosshairs of our team members. Assault team on the left flank was to make entry into the main building from rear, engage the enemy and conduct room by room clearing until our HVT was apprehended.

This was a very crucial time because in order to take out maximum number of terrorists left in the courtyard and on the roofs, our sniper teams and the front assault teams needed to coordinate the target selection and shooting. the sniper teams were going to take out the sentries on the roofs and the terrorists standing behind the vehicles towards the front gates all others that were still inside the vehicles and on the other side of the vehicles and in courtyard were to be targeted by the assault team. Each team member of the assault team had his own sector of fire ensuring all terrorists were going to be hit simultaneously giving

them less or no chance to react. Such scenarios are rehearsed and part of our normal training regime. The 2 sniper teams marked their individual targets near to their sides and as soon as they engaged we were to open fire on the remaining terrorists in the courtyard where the snipers didn't have clear field of fire.

I was among the assault team on the right flank of the main building. Our assault team moved a bit closer to the industrial size generator and took positions along the shed with windows and a small wall. Our ISI team member was to ID the target and any other important players that needed to be brought back alive he is well versed in Waziri dialect and Arabic and any chatter at that time was helpful to realign our assault in the last minutes. We were notified by HQ that other taskforce had already initiated its assault in Hassu/ Zangal Khel.

The place was busy for 3 AM and the hosts had thrown some reception. first there was a lot of hugging and back patting then a group of about 25 people including the new arrivals in 2 pickup trucks and the hosts started moving away from gates and



stopped in the middle of the front yard of the main building and then smaller group of about 8 people was led into the main building with about 3 guests in the middle who were being given some form of a protocol. About one minute and a half had passed since we had crossed the boundary walls after snipers had taken out the sentries. Our HVT was positively identified by ISI embed in our assault team from close range behind the cover of a small partition wall as he was being greeted near the entrance. The information was communicated back to HQ immediately as this information was important for our other taskforce as well so that they stopped looking for HVT who turned out to be in Shakai.

During the greetings the 3 sentries were not missed yet but that could change any moment whenever the terrorists did the headcount and then there was a matter of those guards' dogs and they could blow the cover we had maintained so far. From initial CRT during the day we saw the dogs were confined to the outer boundary of the building and would run around the barn and empty sheds near the boundary wall. As the group of new arrivals went inside we noticed one dog and 3 more

people appearing from the far side and the dog was restless sensing the presence of strangers. Almost at the same time our assault team at the back of the building shot the other dogs with suppressed pistols and moved closer to the main building to enter and gave us 3 clicks on the radio meaning they were standing by. So far all kills had been through suppressed weapons so we still had the element of surprise and we wanted to keep it as long as possible till the completion of the mission.

By now about 3 minutes had just passed. We had the 2 remaining sentries in our target and a remainder group of about 18 people who seemed to disperse at any moment. The front courtyard of the compound was covered by 2 sniper teams where we were situated. The 2 sniper teams had also acquired their targets including the 2 sentries on the rooftops at the front side. We were to engage the enemy from all direction in next five seconds and our short message was "Bismillah".

Employing the violence of action the front team and the snipers engaged the targets and both assault teams entered the main





building from the front and the back as the first 5 terrorists fell from the sniper fire we neutralized all remaining terrorists in the compound before they could recover. We approached the entrance within seconds. The loud noise from the generator in the courtyard masked the short bursts from our silenced P90s & M4s. The sound of sniper fire was much more subdued and didn't cause any reaction from inside the building. Instead of giving people inside the chance to come and investigate we moved in the tactical loose T formation near the entrance. All terrorists and the suspicious dog in the courtyard that were in and around the two vehicles were neutralized along with the sentries on the roofs in a matter of a minute.

Did the sniper fire not alert the people inside the compound?

Normally a report from a rifle can travel up to 2 miles or more depending on the environment, terrain, temperature and humidity. The closest sniper was equipped with a suppressed PSR 90 so it was not an issue and again, the running generator outside the main building and distance of over 600 to 800 meters of

other sniper teams helped in masking the sniper fire from the enemy inside the compound buying us precious moments to enter the building from the front and back entrance. The back entrance was not locked or bolted so there was no need to use any demolition charges and we were going to maintain stealth while breaching the main building.

How did the compound look like inside?  
Was there enough cover to conceal your team?

The main building inside the boundary walls including the courtyard was illuminated with the help of an industrial grade generator. Before breaching the main building we planned to disrupt the power supply to the compound & switch to our NVGs. We disconnected the power supply running to the building but left the generator running. That generator noise was our ally.

After neutralizing the immediate threat of sentries and the terrorists in the courtyard our next priority was to establish footholds as we progressed in our two pronged assault. The courtyard and the rooftops were already secured and our



sniper teams had clear field of fire around the entire compound including the entry points of the assault teams. All approaches to the compound from outside were also covered.

Our Snipers were to provide suppressive fire and neutralize any retaliation from outside while our 2 assault teams cleared the rooms and established footholds in the main alleyways, central halls and areas containing stairs until one of the teams apprehended our HVT.

Please take us through the details of the assault. Because it will be interesting for readers. Due to the media blackout and lack of details we don't know much.

First the assault teams silently approached the entry points and stood by awaiting the call to move in. we notified our sniper teams that we were about to make the entry. Both assault teams entered same time from either side of the building maintaining stealth and speed. Because of the wide opening in the front our assault team moved in a rolling T technique. 2 of us secured the corridors from the front right and left and the rear and 3 entered

the rooms on the right and left. The rooftops and the front and the back courtyards were covered by the snipers. As we moved to clear the rooms we kept the central hallway and the front seating room covered. For each room clearance we took no more than 5 to 10 seconds whether the rooms were occupied or empty. lead member would move inside the room first and acquire a place to dominate the entire room at one corner keeping a straight line from entry to his stopping position few steps ahead in the room to give second person enough space to enter and move to other side and if the room was bigger then, the third person moved in immediately between the entrance and the first person, sweeping the room, shooting while moving neutralizing all threats and then moving out.

Our well-rehearsed movement techniques, firing discipline and maintaining our sector of fire ensured this actual combat was as smooth as our combat exercises keeping the assault fast and decisive. since some terrorists were seen wearing body armor so most shots were aimed at the head and in order to ensure 100% incapacitation shooting between the lips and the eyebrows of



targets. the rooms layout was ordinary some were used as living quarters with bedding on the floor and some had the rations and other supplies and the bigger halls contained machinery, computers and boxes containing ammunition and medical supplies. Since the rooms mostly lacked furniture so clearing them was fast.

It was a two story compound with a possible basement or tunnel system. The rear team leader signaled over the radio that they were moving upstairs. To avoid intersection & friendly fire both teams were to stop after 50 yards inside the compound and confirm positions with the other team unless one of the teams moved one story upwards or down. So far we had not encountered the main body of terrorists and the few people we came across died due to shock and surprise. They were coming out to the courtyard to check the problem with the generator and their torches only helped in targeting them.

It was well over 3 minutes when remaining terrorists eventually realized that they were under attack and losing power was not accidental. They started firing blindly. Now we could use stun

grenades and frag grenades to clear rooms much faster. So to maintain shock impact and disorient the terrorists we lobbed stun grenades as we made entries into the rooms deep inside the compound. The terrorists seemed to be reacting or recovering from the shock of the unsuspected attack. They turned on battery operated lamps and picked up torches to make sense of their surroundings and again that assisted us in targeting them as they moved in the dark with their lamps and torches. Some of them tried to jump out of the windows into the courtyard and were killed by our sniper teams. The south east sniper team reported contact outside the eastern side of the compound when a group of terrorists appeared out of the underground tunnel. The NVG came in handy in taking them out before they could run away or take position to ambush us on our way out.

We were still few rooms away from the center of the building from where the terrorists started firing out of the windows and their Fedayeen took positions across the rooms and corridors and started firing towards the courtyard and across the boundary walls. They were still not sure



about the direction of our assault and many didn't know that we were already inside so many of them were taken out when they were facing the windows in order to give the HVT and other important members chance a to escape.

The people with the HVT probably ran towards the tunnel opening inside the compound situated to the rear of the building where our 2nd assault team was already in position waiting for them at the top decking of the staircase. The assault team had established positions on the top deck of the stairs covering the hallway leading to the exit in the back.

As they heard the footsteps of about 5 or more people they got ready and tossed stun grenades and then carefully neutralized everyone except the HVTs. our team heard the other assault team's code "chakka" (as in cricket's sixer) meaning we had the target who was gagged and cuffed and brought near the exit. HQ was on the same radio frequency and this information was reconfirmed. Our Helicopters were on the standby to pick us up from our predetermined extraction points where we were going to travel for about 2 kilometers after leaving the

compound. The next stage was to mop up and gather any intelligence before leaving the compound.

This stage is as crucial as the earlier stages and there is no room for letting your guard down. The hostile forces can get reinforcements & counterattack or establish an ambush on the possible way out of the area, so the assault team with the HVT took positions around different parts of the compound dominating both the ground and top floor decking and entrances and the other assault team conducted the mop up.

During the mop up we came across a tunnel opening and saw a terrorist climbing up while holding something which was probably explosives in his hands. After getting hit in the head he fell inside and there was an explosion which caused a part of the floor inside a room to collapse the tunnel. We moved through the dust quickly and grabbed another important terrorist alive. Our mop up was complete so we conducted a quick sweep of the building to pick up anything which was worth good intelligence for ISI.

After performing a quick status check and headcount assault teams gave a heads up



to the sniper teams about our departure and dragged our two prisoners out of the building quickly but carefully covering each other and calling out each other to move in short intervals behind cover.

Our exit waypoints were already decided during and after our departure from the main building there was no more shooting from the terrorists. The total time taken between the breach and the exfiltration from the compound was under 30 minutes. There was no time for thorough searching. Our primary target was in custody and we got some potential Intel worthy item and a senior TTP lieutenant as well. So we communicated our departure and left the place watching out for each other and being covered by the snipers who left in the end.

Concealing the departure was also very important which was not possible if the entire force left together in one direction. So we had two different extraction points and we went to our independent locations to be picked up by helicopters.

How did your sniper teams distinguish between your assault teams and the TTP that were rushing to the area?

Three things, situational awareness, IR Beacons and team experience. We were constantly updating each other as we were moving and we were carrying the IR beacons helping the Sniper teams with combat identification and our tactical movement helped to distinguish us from Taliban in the NVGs where there was a problem with LoS between the beacon and the receiver. This comes through experience and fire discipline of our sniper teams.

Was there any Intel worthy material which was taken away along with the prisoners?

After the conclusion of the mop up and confirming all terrorists within the compound were neutralized, we performed the search in the living areas of the place. Since the tunnel had already caved in so there was no risk of a surprise attack from underground inside the compound and the surroundings were already covered by our sniper teams.



We approached everything with caution as a standard precaution and part of our SOP. One assault team with prisoners took positions near the entry points of the compound while the other two teams performed the quick search. Two laptops some memory cards and a hard disk from a desktop computer were retrieved along with some mobile phones, phone Sims, Pakistani and foreign currencies, Pakistani ID cards and some hand written and photo copied training material which is normally found in such places. ISI members of the team took photos of the dead as well for record in case any known terrorist could be crossed out from our database on the terrorists.

You didn't name your HVT, if it wasn't Adnan Rashid then was it Zubair Marwat or Al Masli known for their bomb expertise in Al Qaeda?

Perhaps he was one of them, except Adnan Rashid both these people are apprehended already. Our HVT was a suicide jacket and belt making expert and since his capture we raided various places in tribal and settled areas capturing many terrorists and foiling major terror plots.

Did the Americans request access to the captured foreign terrorists?

I am not aware of this information. We are partners in war on terror and we share information and resources to win this war. The terrorists don't hesitate to seek help from all possible avenues and entities that wish to harm us.

We have our own interest and international obligation to cooperate in this war against terror.

Some politicians and opinion makers don't support the army operation and criticize the army for selling our people to Americans. Don't you think this operation will also be condemned by such people?

The media personalities and politicians are free to have their opinion on this but they shouldn't misguide the public and don't misrepresent the facts.

In case they choose a certain narrative and hold a POV as per their agenda even then the general public should be able to differentiate between facts and misinformation.



Did your team watch out for any booby traps while going through the compound?

The terrorists had not abandoned that hideout and were still living in there hence they didn't rig anything. In the past they have rigged computer equipment, Holy Quran and even the corpses of the civilians and soldiers resulting in further injuries and deaths of other civilians and unsuspecting soldiers.

I performed the status check of the teams and announced that we were leaving the compound with the prisoners to designated waypoints leading to our extraction points. The assault team with the prisoners left first to waypoint WANA which was being covered by the sniper team 3. the entire withdrawal was gradual and in stages where we continued to move quietly but quickly in order to get out before any terrorist reinforcements arrived to ambush us or halt us. The sniper teams were covering our flanks and were last to leave to their nearest extraction point to Walma or WANA.

How about, Hassu/ Zanghal Khel?

This is the brief of the operation that took place between Hassu and Zanghal Khel area in North Waziristan. The task force set itself along the flanks of the complex. The commander decided to launch the assault due to the movement among the terrorists inside their base and it appeared that they were going to move at the night time which meant that the commander had to make a decision to launch the assault instead of waiting for HTV arrival or identification & capture because letting those terrorists slip away and kill troops and civilians in IDP camps was unacceptable.

This was the best course of action because an arrival of HTV was improbable when a contingent of the terrorists was already on the move to launch an attack on IDPs or our outposts, So the commander of this taskforce decided to simultaneously ambush the terrorists inside the compound and those leaving the premises and get one assault team to silently enter from the other side of the complex to catch our HVT or any other notable leaders since they never ever take part in any

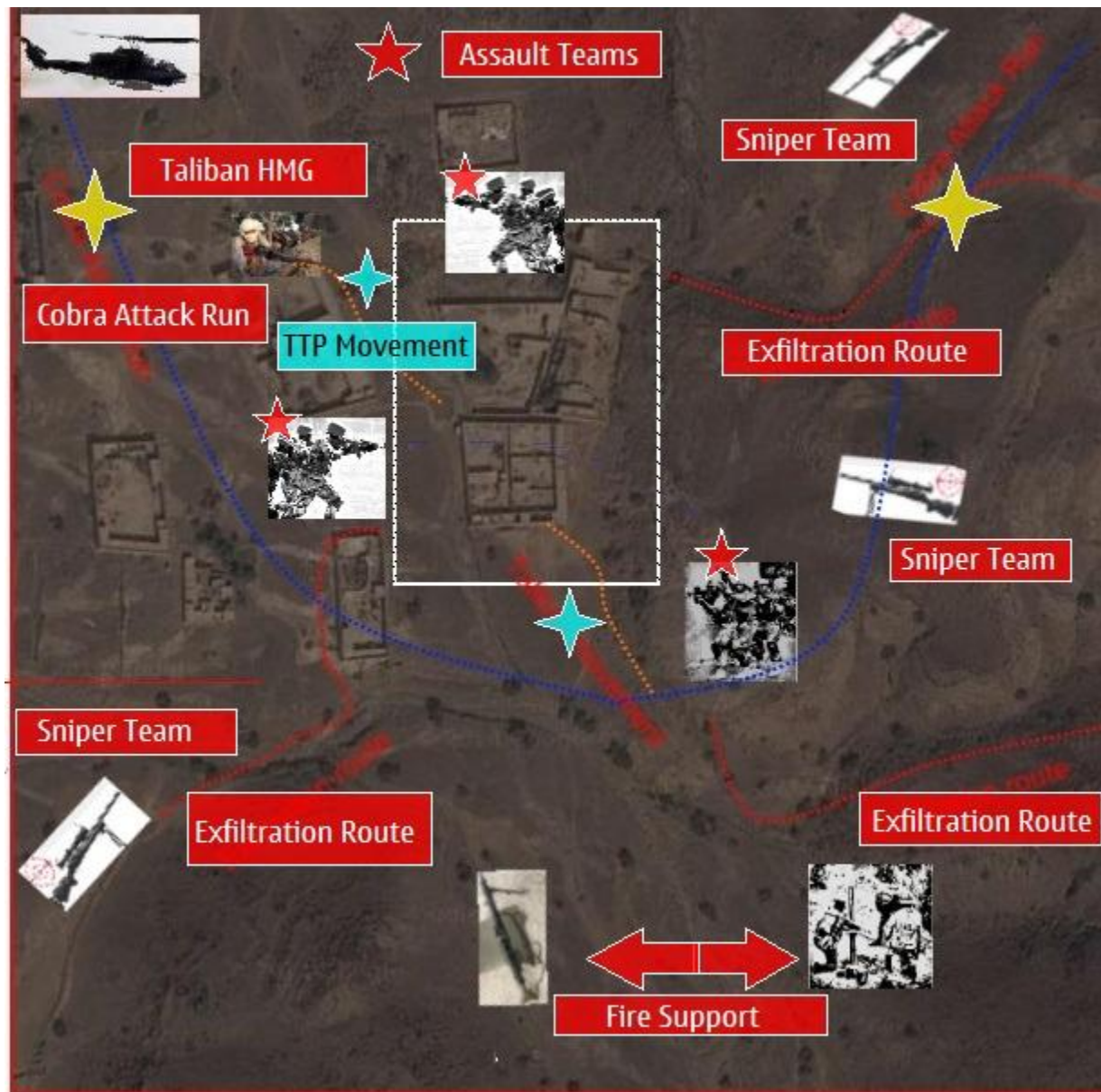


attacks on military or civilians themselves and stay back in the confines of their bases

One assault team made a stealth entry from the sides of the complex at the time when most of the terrorists were already on their way out or were in the front courtyard of the complex. They were able to take positions on the roofs and along

the ground floor of the internal buildings while almost all the terrorists were in the front courtyard getting ready to leave or see off their comrades. The terrorists appeared to be leaving towards the path leading to the MG and mortar team positions.





The terrorist base was a big complex consisting of many buildings interlined with a network of tunnels and streets inside the boundaries. Two large groups of terrorists started leaving the compound southward and North at about midnight

time fully armed. They were heading for an assault on our outposts and IDP camps.

The attack was started with mortar and machine gun fire on the terrorists gathered in the courtyard the terrorists ran in all directions running for cover of



the buildings as expected and were targeted by the assault teams waiting in the ambush. The snipers stationed on the flanks took out the remaining terrorists who desperately tried to regroup. The terrorists suffered the most casualties in the first few minutes of the engagement because by the time mortar shells exploded on top of them. The remaining ones were cut down by snipers, MG fire and 2 assault teams.

Did the whistling sound from the Mortar fire not alert the terrorists in the courtyard about the incoming fire?

There is no whistling sound from mortar fire. The projectile travels at subsonic speed. Although the report from the mortar fire is very loud but it is not heard at the impact location before the projectile reaches it. The whistling sounds are only heard if you are under the path of the artillery projectiles that do travel at supersonic speed. Target never gets to hear any incoming sound of the round whether it's subsonic or supersonic. The suppressive fire from the machine gun and the mortar fire kept the terrorists pinned down which helped our sniper teams from

higher positions to take them out easily. The major portion of the terrorist force was destroyed in our initial assault and they never got the chance to respond or regroup. As the fight raged on they attempted to regroup and made an attempt to counterattack through HMG fire from one of their fortified positions from another house linked via a tunnel. Their fire could pin down our assault teams on their way back so the major called in the help of our gunships to take out that threat which couldn't be hit through ground fire without the risk of suffering casualties.

Can you share other notable things after engaging the terrorists and arresting anyone?

During the assault a 14.5 MM anti- aircraft gun was also discovered in the backyard of one of the buildings and was destroyed. They had explosive laden truck and bikes for suicide ramming of their targets. The terrorists never got the chance to drive them out and they were destroyed with our Cobra gunship which was called in for CAS. The secondary explosions from these vehicles showed that they were rigged with explosives.



The taskforce also captured Tariq Mawviya an important terrorist member of LeJ who had previously walked free from the courts and escaped police custody second time when he was handed over by the army after capturing him during Bajur operation.

What were the casualties the army in this operation?

We managed to keep zero casualties in this operation just like Shakai operation apart from some minor injuries from falling debris. Using the element of surprise and violence of action enabled us to take down the enemy before it could regroup and respond effectively. Our teams also left the area soon after completing their operation.

In this operation almost the entire taskforce waited in an ambush around the entire complex and blocked all possible routes so it employed surprise, superior firepower and better location against the enemy. Only one assault team that had made the stealthy entry into the complex was potentially in more danger due to any remaining hostiles in the building but they

also didn't have to go further because they were immediately notified about HTV's location in Shakai also they had captured a senior terrorist and then they also fortified their positions and took out the terrorists who were trying to evade the fire coming from other teams in the ambush.

In short, we employed technology, superior firepower, coordination, surprise and used terrain to our advantage. We had NV equipment to choose our targets. The terrorists were in the dark, engulfed in the dust and smoke and exploding mortar shells didn't allow them a refuge in one place for longer.

Generally army's most casualties come from IEDs and ambushes where the TTP is prepared and waiting for our troops but this time we were hunting them and had the means and the training to employ every advantage we had and exploit every disadvantage of the terrorists. They didn't recover from surprise and shock.

This unexpected assault that started with the mortar and Machine gun fire resulted in heavy terrorist casualties and their apparently only safe retreat lead them to our assault teams waiting in positions to ambush them.





Their east or westward retreat was also nullified by our sniper teams. They however managed to regroup and blocked the path to the extraction point of one assault team with their heavy machine gunfire from a fortified position in a house

on the north side. There was risk of casualties if their position was attacked by the task force so instead of taking any more risk, the close air support was called in and the cobra gunship did the rest.



How were snipers able to keep up with selecting their targets when there were too many terrorists present?

When a sniper doesn't have a mission against a specific target then in the time of an engagement at a large scale he

prioritizes his hit list depending on the nature and value of the target. Officers and signals personnel are a priority target because taking them out destroys the communications, command and control structure and this is true for terrorists as well because a good sniper will pick up the leaders from the foot soldiers. Other than



that enemy that has RPG or one that is manning a machine gun position is also high on the list because of the firepower it can bring against the friendly forces.

The other considerations are rate of fire and the limited of the ammunition. So every shot has to count and needs to be a true kill preferably head shot or from distance upper part of the torso to disrupt the blood supply to the brain and incapacitate the enemy instantly. A mortal shot might not be enough in a battle because sometimes due to high adrenalin a mortally wounded enemy can carry on fighting for some time and can threaten the lives of your fellow soldiers. For a head shot the region between the lips and the eyebrows is chosen to ensure a certain kill with less chance of missing from distance.

How gunships did selected their targets when they were called in?

The Zhangal Khel taskforce had the OPCON and since the Major had called in the CAS so the coordinates of TTP fortified positions were communicated while the Cobra helicopter was en-route. It circled around the compound and eliminated the remaining threat and loitered the place for

some time until the teams were safely on their way to the extraction points.

Any concluding remarks for Pakistan Defence readers?

Malian counter insurgency experience by British SAS is used as a text book example on how to run a COIN operation, once the main fighting body of the insurgents is broken with the use of specially trained military, the military phase should shift to a police operation conducted by civil administration & overseen by the justice system which basically shows you how much a state is in control. Something that should have happened after the conclusion of Swat operation. The civil administration, the political leadership and justice system has to step up its game to benefit from the military gain and reestablish the state writ permanently.

In counter insurgency there is no such thing as final battle but a continuous effort to deprive the insurgents of their sources and their cover like water from the fish, here water being the IDPs and the fish being the TTP. After that, the source of the TTP war machinery has to be dried up and destroyed. Like Iraq, Pakistan faces



the challenge where its one or more neighbors are actively involved in supporting TTP insurgency in addition to the one in Balochistan and that's where our international diplomacy has to play its role as well to put pressure on those countries to stop their subversive activities. That's what we now know as 4th generation warfare where the battle lines are blurred between civilians and the combatants. So we all are involved one way or another in this fight. Perseverance, will to fight and determination will earn us victory.