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## PRESS FREEDOM

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International Secretariat  
Asia-Pacific Desk

5, rue Geoffroy-Marie  
75009 Paris France  
Tél : (33) 1 44 83 84 84  
Fax : (33) 1 45 23 11 51  
E-mail : [asia@rsf.org](mailto:asia@rsf.org)  
Web : [www.rsf.org](http://www.rsf.org)  
[www.press-freedom.org](http://www.press-freedom.org)

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Clairefontaine

## PAKISTAN - SOUTH WAZIRISTAN

### Who killed Amir Nawab Khan and Allah Noor Wazir?

The 7 February fatal shooting of two reporters in Wana (in the north-western Tribal Area of South Waziristan) was claimed 10 days later by an unknown group calling itself Sipah-e-Islam (Soldiers of Islam). In a fax sent to *The News*, an English-language daily, the group said: "We take responsibility for the murder of the two journalists in South Waziristan last week (...) Some journalists were in the process of working for Christians (...) They are used as tools in the negative propaganda of the Christians against the Muslim mujahideen (...) As well as killing two journalists, we mujahideen killed American spies." The communiqué was signed by Ahmed Farooqi, a name not known to journalists who specialize in covering Pakistani jihadist groups. The *BBC* correspondent **Rahimullah Yousafzai** in Peshawar, for example, said he had never heard of Sipah-e-Islam and thought it would be very hard to verify if it really existed.

The claim supported the position taken by senior officials, including the federal interior minister, who said within hours of the attack that it was an act of terrorism aimed at sabotaging the government's efforts to pacify the Tribal Areas. North West Frontier Province governor Syed Iftikhar Hussain Shah, for his part, said the "miscreants could be foreigners or nationals" and that the government would "eliminate" them with the help of the tribal groups.

The authorities singled out Taliban warlord and Taliban commander Abdullah Mehsud, who opposed any peace accord with the army and who forcefully rejected any reconciliation with his former mentor, Baitullah Mehsud and the Pakistani government. He was the ideal suspect but he quickly denied any involvement in the shooting. In a 9 February phone call to the correspondents of the *BBC World Service* and *Daily Times* in Peshawar, he said his group had nothing to do with the killings: "The government committed this murder in order to accuse me (...) What I do, I take responsibility for it immediately." In the course of the call, he threatened the *BBC* correspondent with reprisals if he did not publish the entire interview.

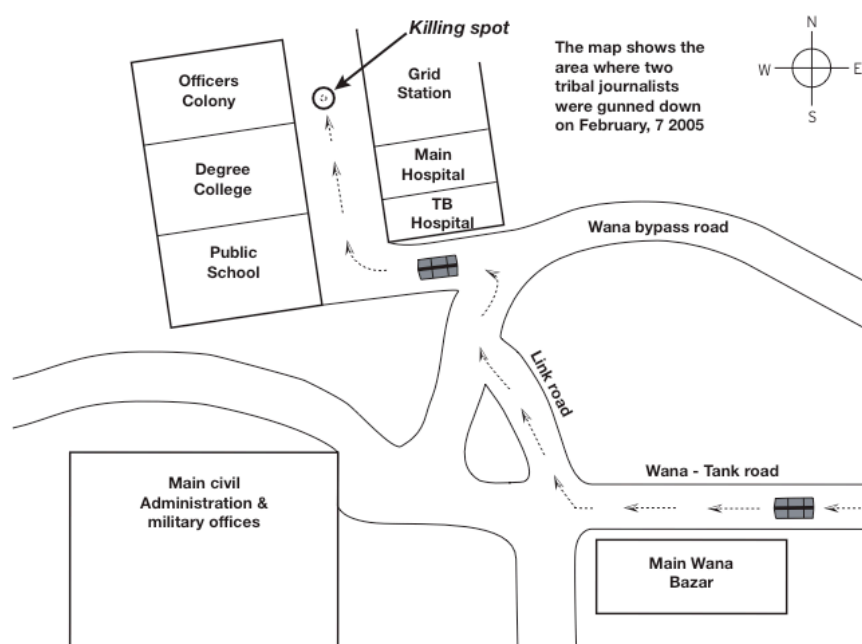
### A shooting in the centre of Wana

Reporters Without Borders spoke to one of the 10 journalists who was in the van that was targeted in the 7 February attack. He said: "We were in the town of Wana near the public hospital at around 7:30 p.m. when a white car overtook our van. Two men sitting one behind the other opened fire on us with AK-47 assault rifles. The shooting took place less than 60 metres from the tribal militia building. They didn't move to stop the attackers (...) Noor's skull exploded while Nawab was hit in the base of the neck. They fired around 60 rounds. Each of them emptied his clip with the aim of killing. After they had finished their job, they did not speed away. They left slowly." This survivor added: "We

*Reporters sans frontières défend les journalistes emprisonnés et la liberté de la presse dans le monde, c'est-à-dire le droit d'informer et d'être informé, conformément à l'article 19 de la Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme. Reporters sans frontières compte neuf sections nationales (Allemagne, Autriche, Belgique, Espagne, France, Grande-Bretagne, Italie, Suède et Suisse), des représentations à Abidjan, Bangkok, Istanbul, Montréal, Moscou, New York, Tokyo et Washington, et plus de cent correspondants dans le monde.*

called for help. Students and members of the tribal militia ran over. They took one of the injured, *AFP* correspondent **Anwar Shakir**, to the public hospital where he underwent an operation for a stomach wound."

The two fatal victims were **Amir Nawab Khan**, who was a cameraman with the international TV news agency *APTN* and a reporter with the Pakistani daily *The Frontier Post*, and **Allah Noor Wazir**, a reporter with the privately-owned Pakistani television station *Khyber TV*, the Lahore-based daily *The Nation* and the German news agency *DPA*. They were killed at the heart of what a local journalist called Wana's "green zone," in an allusion to the highly-protected central part of Baghdad. A strategic town a few kilometres from the Afghan border, Wana is the Pakistani army's centre of operations in its campaign against Taliban and Al-Qaeda groups. The shooting took place about 100 metres from the army's regional headquarters, and opposite official buildings protected by security forces.



The van carrying the journalists was not clearly marked as a press vehicle. It had been provided by the Tribal Area administration so they could attend the surrender of Baitullah Mehsud, one of the Taliban commanders. But the authorities had not laid on any special protection for the press. Still, a local source pointed out that, by providing them with a vehicle, the authorities were helping the press for the first time and that from March 2004 until then they had done nothing but hinder the right to information.

Reporters Without Borders has learned that no suspect was stopped at any of the military checkpoints around Wana although an alert was quickly issued by the security forces. The authorities later said paramilitaries combed the area in a search for the two killers but no arrests were ever announced.

Within the Pakistani government there seem to be differences about the presumed motive for the attack. While the military have loudly

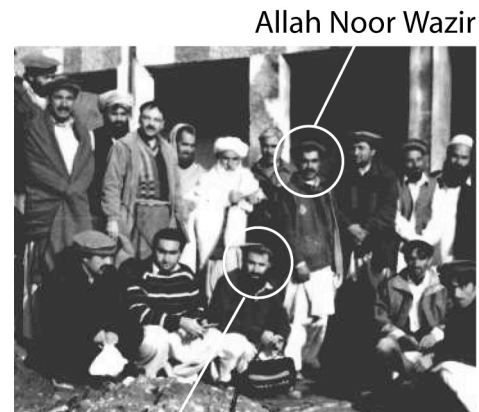
declared it to be a terrorist act, the civilian authorities said in a one of their Daily Situation Report that it was linked to personal quarrels.

### Fear takes hold in the Tribal Areas

The offensive by an international military coalition against the Taliban regime in Kabul at the end of 2001 put the journalists in Pakistan's federally-administered Tribal Areas at the centre of the news. After years of isolation and fight against the authoritarian attitudes of Islamabad's representatives and inter-tribal vendettas, around 100 professional journalists – most of them members of the Tribal Union of Journalists (TUJ) – found themselves being recruited by the Pakistani and international press.

Osama Bin Laden's alleged presence in the Tribal Areas and the Pakistani military offensive of March 2004 put these relatively inexperienced journalists at the heart of international coverage of the war against terrorism. Journalists in the Tribal Areas, many of them now working for more than one news media, had to face new obstacles. The Pakistani army imposed a strict news blackout that cut South Waziristan off from the rest of the world for months. Thanks to its military success, the military government at the end of 2004 began to feel able to invite journalists to cover warlord surrender ceremonies or visit areas recovered from Taliban groups.

The murder of Khan and Wazir, members of the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe who were known for taking a leading role in the past three years, has shaken this community of brave and seasoned journalists to the core. Both had been detained or otherwise prevented from working several times since March 2004. Wazir's editor at the Pashto-language *Khyber Television* described him as "very active and always ready to use his initiative." The video



Amir Nawab Khan

footage shot by Khan was often used by APTN for its reports on the Pakistani army's offensive against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda.

Their deaths has revived fear within the press community in the Tribal Areas. Since March 2003, the journalists there have been used army restrictions and threats from jihadist armed groups, but they have had to face a new, violent and invisible threat since 7 February.

A journalist in Wana who works for a Pakistani newspaper and an international radio station told Reporters Without Borders that he and around 20 other Wana-based journalists adopted additional security measures on 9 February. "We go home earlier and we limit our movements in order to avoid these mysterious killers," he said on condition of anonymity. "It is hard to explain the feeling of fear in which

we live. We don't open the door after nightfall. Many of us are thinking of leaving Wana for Tank, Dera Ismail Khan or Peshawar."

TUJ president **Sailab Mehsud** was categorical: "I fear that there will be new attacks if the killers of Amir Nawab and Allah Noor get away with it."

### **Journalists under threat from the Taliban**

Journalists in the Tribal Areas and Peshawar told Reporters Without Borders that jihadists often harass them if they do not like their work or the terms used in reports about them. "The warlords threaten me with reprisals if I do not report everything they say," the correspondent for a national daily based in Peshawar said. "They do not understand how the modern press operates. They want to be glorified and want us to write long articles about them."

The threats have continued as Taliban chiefs surrendered. A journalist in Dera Ismail Khan (a district in south of Peshawar) said: "I wrote that Baitullah signed the peace accord but the newspaper ran a headline saying he had surrendered. Since then I've been scared because I don't know how they may react." A journalist in Wana recently received a visit from Taliban jihadist militants who were dissatisfied with his articles. "Be careful next time," they said.

On 8 February, the TUJ president appealed to Pakistani editors to try to reduce the risks for them: "Please do not use the word surrender for armed militants. Avoid words that will anger them."

### **Who benefits from the murders?**

The 7 February shooting followed a series of targeted murders which observers blamed on the most radical jihadists. In an article headlined "Psy warfare by Wana militants," *The Friday Times* correspondent in Peshawar, **Iqbal Khattak**, wrote: "While the military offensive has smashed the strongholds of Al Qaeda (...) the militants (...) have changed their retaliation strategy by targeting government employees (...). The strategy seems to have had the desired effect on tribal elders, journalists and government employees." Was the attack on the journalists part of a new stage in this policy of terror waged by increasingly marginalised jihadist groups?

While a personal or tribal dispute cannot be entirely ruled out, most of the Pakistanis questioned by Reporters Without Borders were convinced that it was a premeditated and orchestrated attack aimed at intimidating the press.

No one has publicly accused the security forces, but the ease with which the killers eluded the investigations of an army on a war footing has raised questions.

For religious or security reasons, the militants often take journalists to task for filming or photographing them. The US news agency, *Associated Press*, reported on 8 February that the Taliban attending



Baitullah Mehsud's surrender ceremony some 80 km from Wana became irate about the use of cameras and video cameras by journalists. But would this irritation have been sufficient to have led to this kind of reprisal?

### **Promises to investigate**

Lt. Gen. Safdar Hussain, the head of military operations in South Waziristan, promised a TUJ delegation on 12 February that the killers would be arrested. He also promised that 3,000 euros would be given to the families of the slain reporters and said the army had undertaken to support the press in the Tribal Areas.

Two days before that, Lt. Gen. Safdar Hussain told a delegation of tribal chiefs and religious leaders from Wana that "the government is analysing all the aspects of the murder of the journalists in order to know if they were targeted because of their work, personal quarrels or old enmities."

As the two murdered journalists were TUJ members, the union has gone to great pains to seek justice for them. Its president, Mehsud, went to Islamabad and Peshawar to meet officials. "The killers will be brought to justice," he has repeatedly been promised.

Reporters Without Borders fully supports the grievances which the TUJ has presented to the civilian and military authorities. The international press freedom organization calls for a thorough investigation into this attack, an investigation in which all possible motives are explored. It must go beyond the mysterious claim of responsibility by an unknown group.

