

## TRIBE: MEHSUD

### PRIMARY LOCATIONS:

The Mehsud Tribe inhabits a large portion of the center of Waziristan, which is drained by the Tank Zam and Shahur Rivers. The Mehsud territory is a rough triangle between Jandola, the hills north of Razmak, and from Shuidar to Janimela, north of Wana. No portion of their territory touches the “settled” districts, and the tribe is surrounded on the north and west by the Wazirs, on the east by the Bhattanis, and on the south by the Wazirs and Shranis.<sup>i</sup>

With the exception of a few Shabi Khel in the Bannu District, some land near Gumal in the Tank Tehsil, and the colonies at Chark and elsewhere in the Logar Valley in Afghanistan, none of the Mehsuds own land outside of South Waziristan Agency. To escape the severe cold in the higher hills during the winter, a large number move down to the lower valleys but always keep within the Mehsud territorial limits. Many of these people live in caves or tents.

Although the majority of Mehsuds live in Waziristan, there are a few colonies at the villages of Chark and Mokhand, and elsewhere in the Logar Valley in Afghanistan. There are also groups of Mehsuds near Gumal and Tank, and in Landidak in Bannu.<sup>ii</sup>

“South Waziristan is mountainous with several high peaks; Pirghal, for example, being 11,600 feet. The Gomal is the main river, in addition to which there are many hill torrents, which...remain dry for most of the year.”<sup>iii</sup> The mountains and valleys geographically isolate the Mehsuds from large scale movements of invaders and provide excellent opportunities to conduct effective ambushes on enemies.<sup>iv</sup> The cave villages along the Shahur River near Barwand and along the Split Toi provide excellent hiding places and defensive positions.



**RELIGION/SECT:**

The Mehsud Tribe are of the Hanafi sect of Sunni Islam.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

The Mehsud Tribe, located in the rough, isolated geographic center of South Waziristan, has a long history of militant and insurgent activities against non-Pashtun and governmental political control. During Britain's Afghan wars and the Waziristan Campaign of 1919-20, the Mehsud Tribe gained a reputation as "probably the most formidable fighting men on the Frontier...fiercely independent, their fighting skills honed by centuries of raiding."<sup>v</sup>

Today they play a major role in the anti-government and anti-US movement. Mehsud tribesmen make up a majority of the 20,000 fighters belonging to the TTP, which formerly fell under the leadership of Baitullah Mehsud.<sup>vi</sup> Following the collapse of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Mehsud Tribe, along with others in North and South Waziristan, welcomed thousands of al Qaeda and foreign militants who escaped across the border from Tora Bora, providing them sanctuary and room to regroup and rebuild. This relationship developed into the formation of the Taliban Movement of Pakistan (TTP).<sup>vii</sup>

Every Mehsud considers himself as an equal to other Mehsuds, hence tribal leadership is a challenge.<sup>viii</sup> The rise of the TTP and the influence of al Qaeda has created a leadership structure independent of the tribe.

**ALLIANCES:**

During the British Waziristan Campaign in 1919-20, the Wazirs and Mehsuds worked together against the British and against each other, based on changing political and military realities.<sup>ix</sup> Post 9/11, the Mehsuds and Wazirs have competed for control of the border regions and a share of the resources provided by al Qaeda. In February 2009, the now deceased Baitullah Mehsud joined with Waziri leaders Maulvi Nazir (Wana, South Waziristan) and Hafiz Gul Bahadur (Miranshah, North Waziristan) to form the Council of United Mujahideen.<sup>x</sup>

**FEUDS:**

Historically there have been no feuds inside the tribe, as the "Dre Mehsud" (three Mehsud clans - the Alizai, Bahlolzai and Shaman Khel) live intermixed. However, the rise of the TTP has resulted in infighting among the Mehsuds. In 2005, the TTP targeted tribesmen opposed to the Taliban, killing more than 60 tribal and religious leaders for "being American spies."<sup>xi</sup>

The Mehsuds have a historical conflict with the Bhattanis and the Wazirs, as they fight over territory and grazing rights. Territorial lines near Razmak are still contested between the Abdullai Mehsud and the Bora Khel Wazirs. Relations with the Waziri tribes remain tenuous.

**KEY TERRAIN FEATURES:**

Valleys: Baddar, Darra Algad, Khaisara, Mastang, Shaktu, Sheranna, Split Toi, Tak Zam

Plains: Razmak

Mountains: Pre Ghal, Spinghar, Spinkamar

Rivers: Tak Zam, Gumal, Shahur, Shinkai Toi, Baddar Toi, Split Toi, Lower Khaisara Toi, Tauda China

**WEATHER:**

The climate in the region is hot in summer, with high temperatures around 110 degrees Fahrenheit, and cool in winter, with low temperatures around 35 degrees Fahrenheit. There is modest rainfall in July and August and in January and February.

**MIGRATORY PATTERNS:**

Many Mehsuds inhabit caves in the lower valleys during the winter. They return to family compounds at higher elevations during the summer when the caves are infested with fleas.

**MAJOR TOWNS:**

Kaniguran

Makin

**RELATIONSHIP WITH TALIBAN/AL-QAEDA:**

With the initial collapse of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the rise of the TTP, the relationship between Mehsud tribesmen and al Qaeda and the Taliban has strengthened. The initial influx of foreign fighters and Taliban from Tora Bora has resulted in the creation of 157 known training camps, many within Mehsud territory.<sup>xii</sup> Baitullah Mehsud, along with other militant leaders in Waziristan, had sworn “fealty to al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and the overall Taliban leader Mullah Omar” in February 2009.<sup>xiii</sup> Additionally, one of Osama bin Laden’s sons trained as a commander under Baitullah Mehsud.<sup>xiv</sup>

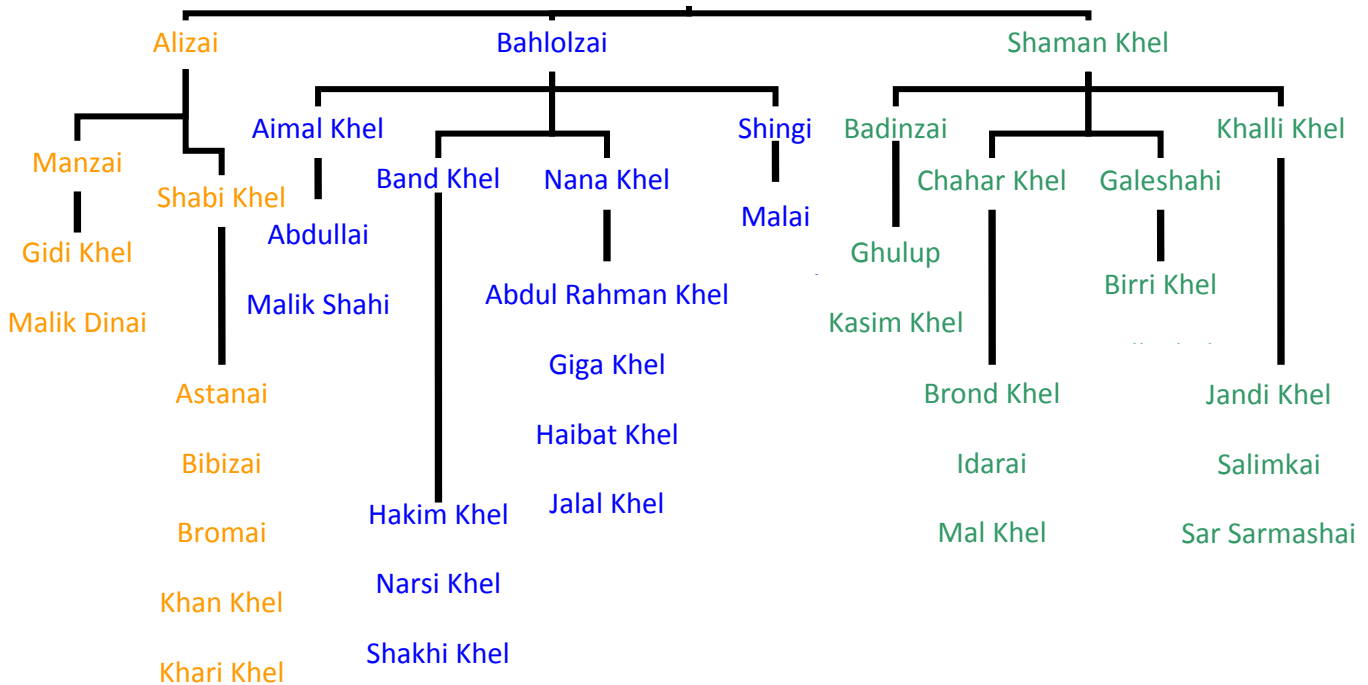
Baitullah Mehsud, a Mehsud tribesman from the Bannu region of the North West Frontier Province, was the leader of the TTP. As a result, he had significant influence in North and South Waziristan, Swat, and increasingly around Islamabad.<sup>xv</sup> He worked directly with al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Tehrik-e Taliban-e Pakistan or the Taliban Movement of Pakistan (TTP) is active in the Mehsud territory. With more than 20,000 militants, the TTP has spread its influence from the northwest toward Islamabad. Its stated purpose is to overthrow the Pakistani state. The TTP has been linked

to suicide attacks throughout much of Pakistan. It is estimated that more than 2,000 people have been killed in suicide attacks and beheadings by the TTP.

In 2005, the TTP entered into a ceasefire agreement with the Pakistani Army, effectively giving the TTP time and space to rebuild its networks and recruit and train new members. The ceasefire collapsed in 2007, followed by the kidnapping of 200 Pakistani soldiers by the TTP. The soldiers were eventually traded for 25 Taliban prisoners.<sup>xvi</sup> Benazir Bhutto's assassination in December 2007 was blamed on the TTP.<sup>xvii</sup>

### MEHSUD TRIBAL TREE



## PROGRAM FOR CULTURE & CONFLICT STUDIES

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- <sup>i</sup> Tribal Hierarchy & Dictionary of Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas. (First Edition). NGA Office of Counterterrorism, 2005.
- <sup>ii</sup> Wylly, H.C., *From the Black Mountain to Waziristan*. Sang-e-Meel Publications, Lahore, Pakistan 1912.
- <sup>iii</sup> Ahmad, Kazi S., *A Geography of Pakistan*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1966): 172.
- <sup>iv</sup> Robson, 147 and 149. Ahmed Rasid describes the area as follows: "With its high mountains, steep slopes, deep ravines littered with broken rock and shale, and its thick forests, it was an ideal hideout. Many of the valleys were virtually inaccessible, except along steep winding paths that required the ability of mountain climbers, and were easy to defend.," Rashid, 268.
- <sup>v</sup> Brian Robson, *Crisis on the Frontier: The Third Afghan War and the Campaign in Waziristan 1919-20* (Gloucestershire: Spellmount, 2007): 149.
- <sup>vi</sup> BBC News Report, "Profile: Baitullah Mehsud," (26 March 2009) at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/7163626.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7163626.stm), accessed on 29 April 2009.
- <sup>vii</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The U.S. and the Disaster in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (London: Penguin Books, 2009): 93, 268.
- <sup>viii</sup> Robson, 147 and 149. Ahmed Rasid describes the area as follows: "With its high mountains, steep slopes, deep ravines littered with broken rock and shale, and its thick forests, it was an ideal hideout. Many of the valleys were virtually inaccessible, except along steep winding paths that required the ability of mountain climbers, and were easy to defend.," Rashid, 268.
- <sup>ix</sup> Brian Robson, *Crisis on the Frontier: The Third Afghan War and the Campaign in Waziristan 1919-20* (Gloucestershire: Spellmount, 2007): 156.
- <sup>x</sup> Bill Roggio, "US Predator kills 4 in South Waziristan strike," *The Long War Journal* (8 April 2009) at [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/04/us\\_predator\\_kills\\_4.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/04/us_predator_kills_4.php), accessed on 29 April 2009.
- <sup>xi</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The U.S. and the Disaster in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (London: Penguin Books, 2009): 93, 275.
- <sup>xii</sup> Bill Roggio, "US Predator kills 4 in South Waziristan strike," *The Long War Journal* (8 April 2009) at [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/04/us\\_predator\\_kills\\_4.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/04/us_predator_kills_4.php), accessed on 29 April 2009.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Bill Roggio, "US Predator kills 4 in South Waziristan strike," *The Long War Journal* (8 April 2009) at [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/04/us\\_predator\\_kills\\_4.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/04/us_predator_kills_4.php), accessed on 29 April 2009.
- <sup>xiv</sup> The Telegraph, "Terror plot: Baitullah Mehsud profile," (10 April 2009) at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/politics/lawandorder/5132270/Terror-plot-Baitullah-Mehsud-profile.html>, accessed on 29 April 2009.
- <sup>xv</sup> Janes, "Pakistan's most wanted: Baitullah Mehsud," (12 February 2008) at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2009/03/120863.htm>, accessed on 29 April 2009.
- <sup>xvi</sup> The Guardian, "Is Baitullah Mehsud now public enemy No 1 for the US?," (5 April 2009) at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/apr/05/baitullah-mehsud-pakistan>, accessed on 29 April 2009.
- <sup>xvii</sup> BBC News; and The Times.