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Supposedly wiped out after September 11, 2001, the **Taliban are back**. Their attacks have increased markedly, their tactics have become increasingly brutal. Suicide bombings, roadside bombs and beheadings have put NATO forces on the defensive. Just a few days ago, the commander of British troops in Afghanistan stated that the problem is the Taliban cadre. The hard core must be eliminated, he said, or else there will be no chance for peace.

Sami Yousafzai and **Urs Gehriger** of **Die Weltwoche** recently met with a member of that hard core. In the border area between Afghanistan and Pakistan, they sat down to cups of green tea with **Mullah Sabir**. During the years of Taliban rule (1994-2001) Sabir, 40, was responsible for security along the border with Iran. Today he is governor of Ghazni Province (south of Kabul) and commander of 900 fighters. Seated on a thick cushion and flanked by two bodyguards, he spent an hour talking about victory, strategy, spies, and his view of the world. He also proffered, for the first time, a copy of the **Taliban's new code of regulations**.

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The new Taliban codex

Die Weltwoche: Mullah Sabir, the top Taliban leadership recently held a conclave at a secret location. What was the mood like?

Mullah Sabir: Look at the news reports. Half of Afghanistan is again under our control. We have advanced to just outside of Kabul. President Hamid Karzai is a **prisoner in his own palace**. True, he constantly flies around the world and spends time with the powerful leaders of the West. But in his own country he does not even dare to travel around. You can well imagine that, at our meeting of 33 Taliban chiefs, the mood was **anything but sombre**.

Until now the Taliban leadership consisted of only ten men.

That's how it was. Now we have **33**. The area under our rule encompasses an ever-increasing number of provinces. This year we have returned to Nimroz, Farah, Mardan and Logar. This gain in power is reflected in the growth of our governing council.

Forty thousand Allied troops are now in Afghanistan, fighting bitterly against the Taliban. Isn't it rather reckless to assemble the entire leadership in one spot?

A meeting like that is essential to evaluating our position. Normally we only meet once a year. The recent meeting was the second one this year – another sign of our **newly regained power**.

When Western leaders confer there is generally chaos on the roads and a storm of reporters' flashbulbs. How should we imagine the atmosphere at a summit of the Warriors of God?

Three members of the Shura (Council) were responsible for organising the meeting. During two weeks of planning they chose the conference locale. Through informal channels, they then informed us of a point of assembly, from which guides led us to

the actual meeting place. The spot was **surrounded by mountains**, and guards were posted on every summit. The conference took place in a mosque, beneath which there was a bunker where we could have taken refuge in the event of an attack from the air. The meeting lasted for one day, and was interrupted only twice, for prayer and to eat.

What subjects were discussed?

The focus was on military strategy and internal behavioral questions.

What did you decide that was new?

The main message was delivered by the Taliban Defense Minister, **Hajji Obaidullah**. He presided over the meeting and also issued to us the "Layeha," our new manual of military rules.

[Mullah Sabir reaches into his breast pocket and brings out a white pamphlet. On its cover, printed in blue, is the emblem of the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan": a Koran with two crossed sabres. The same image served as the official emblem during the days of the Taliban regime. In contrast to the former edition, the new Layeha has been printed in small format, making it easy for Taliban fighters to carry it with them even in battle. The Layeha consists of 15 densely printed pages, bound together with staples. There is a list of 30 rules written in the Pashtun language.

The new codex addresses three main subjects: behaviour towards "infidels" and enemies of Islam, the administration of justice, and rules of daily life. The latter category includes a **ban on relations with young boys**. A notably large number of rules are concerned with disciplinary matters within the Taliban organisation as the group's swift expansion of power has apparently resulted in a certain coarsening of behaviour. For example, the Codex explicitly warns against selling Taliban equipment and property or using them for personal purposes. Another apparent problem area is increasing competition among Taliban groups and uncontrolled plundering.]

How is the discipline in your ranks?

We had a problem with **spies**. But their number has shrunk considerably. We've killed hundreds of such traitors, almost all of them Afghans, some even across the border in Pakistan.

Who passes judgement on alleged traitors?

Only district and provincial commanders are permitted to pass such judgement. The trials are subject to precise rules. For example, no one may be punished before a court with proper jurisdiction has confirmed his guilt.

[In the past year there has been a sharp rise in beheadings and vigilante justice among the Taliban. The Taliban military chief Mullah Dadullah has proven himself especially bloodthirsty; he has been known to **behead prisoners with his own hand** and, like Zarqawi, the recently killed al-Qaida leader in Iraq, has had executions filmed and then broadcast on the Internet. The new codex explicitly states that neither Taliban soldiers nor low-level commanders may intervene in disputes among the populace. It also stipulates that even prisoners suspected of espionage must be given an official hearing; before sentence is passed, there must be testimony from witnesses who are in good mental health and enjoy a spotless religious reputation.]

What rules are in force regarding civilians?

We are required to exercise great restraint. The Layeha prescribes that we may not enter civilian homes or confiscate civilian property without permission from a provincial or district commander.

That doesn't seem to have been the case so far. In recent months the Taliban have burned down dozens of schools. What is the purpose of such actions?

Our motto is: **no official schools**. They are merely political tools of the present regime. Whoever permits such schools to operate is also supporting the government of Hamid Karzai and the infidels.

[The Layeha prescribes that only religious scholars are permitted to serve as teachers, and only textbooks from the period of the former Taliban regime are allowed. Teachers at government schools are to be given a warning first, and if they defy the ban on their activities they are to be beaten; however, anyone who gives instruction which "violates the principles of Islam" is to be killed by a district commander or group leader.]

What is your attitude towards NGOs which are building roads and digging wells to improve people's lives?

The organisations which have come here under the new administration **only pretend to help the people**. In reality they are part of the government. Whatever they may propose to build – bridges, clinics, schools – we will not tolerate their activities.

*There have been nearly **one hundred suicide bombings** in Afghanistan since the beginning of this year. Have the Taliban lost their pride and their courage to fight the enemy in open combat?*

With their combat planes and precision bombs, the enemy is far superior to us technologically. The suicide bombings are a tactic with which we drive the enemy to panic. Without this **miracle weapon** we would never accomplish our goal of re-conquering all of Afghanistan.

[The recently issued manual of rules does not deal with the phenomenon of suicide bombings, which is new to Afghanistan. The subject is treated in a separate 40-page document, in which suicide bombings are declared legitimate **with the aid of citations from the Koran**. Suicide bombers are described as "Omar's missiles," referring to Taliban leader Mullah Omar.]

Who wrote the new rule book?

I don't know exactly. Mullah Abdul Ali, our mufti responsible for religious questions, was certainly consulted. The new Layeha was approved by our supreme leader, **Mullah Omar**.

[There are numerous legends surrounding the one-eyed Omar, who has led the Taliban since 1994. He is hardly ever heard from and never makes public appearances. Even most Taliban officials have never seen him.]

Did Omar participate in the recent conclave?

No.

Rumour has it that he is in poor health.

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There are many rumours. Mullah Omar does not participate in large meetings for security reasons. He remains in a safe place. Only two people have direct access to him: Defense Minister Obaidullah and his brother-in-law Mullah Birader.

How strong are the Taliban today?

We have about **15,000 men**. Forty percent are not really Taliban, have not graduated from any religious school; they are youngsters who join our ranks in sympathy [with our cause].

How do you explain the increase in the numbers of young fighters?

People see with increasing clarity how corrupt the Karzai government is. It ignores the problems of ordinary people. **Karzai is a puppet**, a servant of the Americans.

The Afghans chose him in free elections. This was also a vote against the Taliban.

Let me make one thing clear to you: we would not be here without support from the populace. There is an Afghan proverb which says: "You cannot be part of a village if the village doesn't want you." People do not trust Karzai's corrupt justice. They remember the virtues of our [Taliban] regime. Back then there was **absolute security** [in the country]. The crime rate dropped to zero. Now, people are once again seeking the advice of our judges. In my province alone we have six Sharia courts.

Where do you get your weapons and money?

During the fasting month of Ramadan, ordinary people donated large sums. They also supply us with food and clothing. Our people take good care of us.

Do you get help from al-Qaida?

No. Nor do I have any al-Qaida fighters among my troops. The only foreigners in our ranks come from **Chechnya and Uzbekistan**. But if al-Qaida warriors want to join us, they are welcome.

Previously, close relations with al-Qaida cost the Taliban their governing power. Why don't you keep your distance from such foreign forces?

Their struggle is against the infidels. Their enemy is our enemy. How could we justify before Allah taking up the sword against them?

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Read the full English translation of the new **Taliban codex** [here](#).

The interview originally appeared in **Die Weltwoche** on November 16, 2006.

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