

The execution of Ebu Zer

Turkey's most high-profile jihadist was killed by the Taliban in Pakistan's tribal areas. *Jane's* examines the impact his death will have on Turkish support for jihadist activity in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

KEY POINTS

- Serdal Erbasi (also known as Ebu Zer), Turkey's most high-profile jihadist, has been killed in Pakistan's tribal areas after being accused of killing two fellow foreign fighters in a dispute over money.
- Turkish jihadist websites suggested that the Taliban court's decision to execute him was unjust and had agitated other foreign fighters in the tribal areas.
- Ebu Zer's death could have a serious impact on Turkish support for jihadist activity in Afghanistan and Pakistan as he appears to have been extensively involved in raising money and recruiting fighters.
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Ebu Zer, right, and Ebu Ömer, leaders of the Azeri-Turkish group Taifetul Mansura (victorious sect).

The death of Ebu Zer, Turkey's most high-profile jihadist, at the hands of fellow Islamist militants in Pakistan's tribal areas could undermine Turkish support for the insurgency in the region.

Ebu Zer was the kunya (nom de guerre) of a Turkish man called Serdal Erbaşı. Very little is known about his background, although Turkish media reports published after his death said he was born in the city of Konya in central Turkey.

Turkish jihadist websites said he had travelled to fight with separatists in Chechnya 16 years before his death, meaning that he would have been involved in the 1994-1996 Russo-Chechen war.

The conflict attracted numerous Turks, many of them 'evlad i fatih han' (the descendants of immigrants from the former Ottoman Empire territories in the Balkans and Caucasus), who volunteered to fight in what they regarded as their ancestral homelands. Ebu Zer may have served in the ranks of

the Jamaat Osmanly, a unit comprised of Turkish fighters. Ebu Zer also fought in the Russo-Chechen war that broke out in 1999. Pro-rebel websites have published numerous photographs of him with fellow militants, including one showing him sitting next to Dokka Umarov, who became the leader of the significantly weakened Chechen insurgents in June 2006.

Ebu Zer also appeared in several videos posted on jihadist websites in an attempt to drum up Turkish support for the militants. In 2008, for example, he appeared with a Chechen commander identified as Seyid Ömer in an Azzam Medya video to declare they would fight on against the Russians.

Victorious sect

Ebu Zer appears to have been back in Turkey when this video was released. In a written 'interview' posted on Turkish jihadist websites in April 2009, he explained that he and some of his colleagues had returned to

Turkey in the summer of 2007. They tried to get back to the North Caucasus the following year, but the August 2008 war between Russia and Georgia made it impossible to cross the border.

He said in the interview that, having returned to Turkey, the group decided to travel to Afghanistan instead. "Muslims are the same for us everywhere. They are the same here as the Chechens except for their different clothes. The same thing is happening here as in Chechnya: they are destroying honour," he explained. "We will keep our jihad going here for a while, but it does not mean we have forgotten Chechnya."

Ebu Zer claimed that a Turkish and Azeri group called Taifetul Mansura (victorious sect) had been established under the command of the Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar. "We met with the emirs appointed by Mullah Omar and we started our group under the Taliban," he said. "All of our comrades came here ... Azeris and Turks