

Al Qaeda says would use Pakistani nuclear weapons

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By Inal Ersan

DUBAI (Reuters) - If it were in a position to do so, Al Qaeda would use Pakistan's nuclear weapons in its fight against the United States, a top leader of the group said in remarks aired on Sunday.

Pakistan has been battling al Qaeda's Taliban allies in the Swat Valley since April after their thrust into a district 100 km (60 miles) northwest of the capital raised fears the nuclear-armed country could slowly slip into militant hands.

"God willing, the nuclear weapons will not fall into the hands of the Americans and the mujahideen would take them and use them against the Americans," Mustafa Abu al-Yazid, the leader of al Qaeda's in Afghanistan, said in an interview with Al Jazeera television.

Abu al-Yazid was responding to a question about U.S. safeguards to seize control over Pakistan's nuclear weapons in case Islamist fighters came close to doing so.

"We expect that the Pakistani army would be defeated (in Swat) ... and that would be its end everywhere, God willing."

Asked about the group's plans, the Egyptian militant leader said: "The strategy of the (al Qaeda) organisation in the coming period is the same as in the previous period: to hit the head of the snake, the head of tyranny -- the United States.

"That can be achieved through continued work on the open fronts and also by opening new fronts in a manner that achieves the interests of Islam and Muslims and by increasing military operations that drain the enemy financially."

The militant leader suggested that naming a new leader for the group's unit in the Arabian Peninsula, Abu Basir al-Wahayshi, could revive its campaign in Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter.

"Our goals have been the Americans ... and the oil targets which they are stealing to gain power to strike the mujahideen and Muslims."

"There was a setback in work there for reasons that there is no room to state now, but as of late, efforts have been united and there is unity around a single leader."

Abu al-Yazid, also known as Abu Saeed al-Masri, said al Qaeda will continue "with large scale operations against the enemy" -- by which he meant the United States.

"We have demanded and we demand that all branches of al Qaeda carry out such operations," he said, referring to attacks against U.S.-led forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The militant leader said al Qaeda would be willing to accept a truce of about 10 years' duration with the United States if Washington agreed to withdraw its troops from Muslim countries and stopped backing Israel and the pro-Western governments of Muslim nations.

Asked about the whereabouts of al Qaeda's top leaders, he said: "Praise God, sheikh Osama (bin Laden) and sheikh Ayman al-Zawahri are safe from the reach of the enemies, but we would not say where they are; moreover, we do not know where they are, but we're in continuous contact with them."

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