

The quiet lawyer who is taking on Pakistan's Taliban

Fibran Nasir is leading the protests at Islamabad's Red Mosque against those who condone the school massacre. Death threats won't silence him, he tells **OMAR WARAICH**

The Taliban called Jibran Nasir, a charismatic 27-year-old lawyer, on his mobile phone. "If you don't take your actions back, and if you don't stop harassing the imam of the Red Mosque, then you are putting yourself, your family and your people at risk," said the spokesman for the Pakistani Taliban's Jamiat Ahrar faction. "And don't think that we can't reach you, or that we are weak. We may be weak, but we don't forget our enemies."

The call, a little over a week ago, came after Mr Nasir set up a vigil outside the extremist mosque in Islamabad, drawing hundreds of Pakistanis to rally against a pro-militant preacher there. The unprecedented action came after the mosque's leader, Maulana Abdulaziz, refused to denounce or condemn the Taliban after the massacre at a military-run school in the north-western city of Peshawar, where 141 people, including 132 children, were killed. Mr Nasir has been trying, so far unsuccessfully, to get the imam of the Red Mosque arrested for issuing threats of violence and inciting hatred. In return, he has been accused of blasphemy. And in Pakistan, the mere suggestion that someone has committed blasphemy can put their life in jeopardy.

The Red Mosque in the heart of Islamabad has been a feared and notorious centre of pro-Taliban sympathy since 2007, when the Pakistan army mounted an operation against it. "We are not against mosques," Mr Nasir said yesterday. "We want to safeguard them against extremism and terrorism."

In 2011, two senior government officials were assassinated after they were accused of committing blasphemy for insisting that Pakistan's laws be reformed and a poor Christian mother of five be released after being convicted on a bogus charge of blasphemy.

One recent image circulated on social media showed Mr Nasir's photograph next to a dangling noose, with the claim that he is trying to



Jibran Nasir (right) protests at the Red Mosque in Islamabad **MOSHARRAF ZAIDI**

spread sectarianism in Pakistan and destroy mosques. The image exhorts the government to hang Mr Nasir. Another image carried the hashtag "#HangJibranNasir". The campaign is led by outlawed anti-Shia militant groups sympathetic to the Red Mosque. They equate the anti-Taliban protesters with convicted terrorists.

Despite the threats he faces, Mr Nasir remains calm, though he has had to keep a lower profile. "I live by the principle that you only have a certain amount of time here, you might as well spend that speaking the truth," he told *The Independent*. As a civil society activist, he has spent recent years confronting the militant threat on Pakistan's streets.

Last year, after a church in Peshawar was bombed, killing nearly 100 people, Mr Nasir led efforts to form a human chain around the country's major churches. He took Sunni and Shia Muslim clerics with him to Sunday services, where they condemned terrorism in speeches to the parishioners.

Mr Nasir maintained his composure during the conversation he recorded a week ago, asking whether this was the official position of the Tal-

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iban faction. "If the mosque preaches peace and love, it would be very good," Mr Nasir told the Taliban spokesman. "Otherwise we'll stay standing where we are."

This is the first time that members of Pakistan's beleaguered civil society have taken to the streets in such large numbers. In the past, such activities have involved candlelight vigils for the victims of terrorism, not vast protests with placards denouncing the Taliban or demanding that extremists surrender the mosques to the people.

"Run, burka, run," one placard said at a demonstration in Islamabad, referring to an incident when Maulana Abdulaziz fled the 2007 army siege of the mosque in a woman's shroud. In solidarity, protesters in Karachi taunted the Taliban spokesman who threatened Mr Nasir. "Call us, too," one sign read. "We have free talk time and package." A leading women's rights activist held a placard that read: "We are all Jibran."

On Monday this week, Mr Nasir and a delegation of activists met with Pakistan's Information Minister, Pervez Rasheed. "I handed over the evidence of hate speech against me. He has personal knowledge of it. If anything happens, they knew what was going on. They haven't provided us with any security."

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government and the military have agreed on 20 steps to tackle terrorism.

The government plans to try terrorism suspects in military courts, block the use of social media and other forms of communication by terrorists, and establish a 5,000-member paramilitary force. But Mr Nasir remains resolute and believes that after the Peshawar massacre, Pakistanis, who are among the principal victims of terrorism, can take on the menace themselves. "I'm a Pakistani. This is a Pakistani narrative," he said.

"We are not a nation of Taliban apologists and extremists. We don't need anyone to come and help us. We just need to break our silence."



Bear necessities

Papier-mâché pandas made by the French artist Paulo Grangeon stand near a statue of the Hindu god of war, Lord Murugan, at Batu Caves in Malaysia yesterday. The sculptor's travelling exhibit *Pandas on Tour* – a collaboration with the World Wildlife Fund – features 1,600 pandas, representing the estimated number left worldwide, and has visited landmarks in dozens of countries **LAI SENG/AP**



Detective who caught serial killer 'Son of Sam' dies, aged 99

ANDREW BUNCOMBE
IN NEW YORK

The ties were loud, the streets of 1970s New York were dangerous and the detective appointed to rid the city of a notorious serial killer was a devout Catholic called Timothy Dowd. And after leading

the biggest police operation in the city's history, Dowd tracked down David Berkowitz, the serial killer who called himself the Son of Sam.

"Inspector, you finally got me. I guess this is the end of the trail," Berkowitz, a mentally disturbed postal worker, told the officer after the net closed on him.

Yesterday, the family of Detective Dowd, who led what was dubbed Operation Omega, said he passed away on Friday in the village of Millbrook, New York state. He was 99.

"He was always a very driven person – that contributed to the successful conclusion of the case," Dowd's daughter, Melissa Dowd Begg, told the *New York Daily News*. "He would leave no stone

turned and he would not allow anyone who worked for him to leave a stone unturned. They followed every lead relentlessly."

The killings that sent terror throughout the five boroughs of New York City began in July 1976 with the shooting of Donna Laurie, an 18-year-old woman from the Bronx. Her friend, Jody Valenti, 19, was wounded. Berkowitz went on to murder six people and wound seven others in attacks in the Bronx, Queens and Brooklyn before he was captured on 10 August 1977. He was also known as "the .44-calibre killer", after the weapon he used.

Dowd, who was born in Ireland and whose parents moved to the US during the Depression, was put in charge

of a team of 50 officers. But as Berkowitz kept striking, the team expanded to about 300.

Police noticed that while the killings appeared to be random, there were some similarities: Berkowitz struck at night, often targeted people with long hair and taunted the police with letters. He sent one such missive to a journalist and columnist called Jimmy Breslin: "Hello from the gutters of NYC which are filled with dog manure, vomit, stale wine, urine and blood," it said. "Hello from the sewers of NYC which swallow up these delicacies when they are washed away by the sweeper trucks."

Dowd ordered his officers to patrol in unmarked cars and policewomen with long, dark hair were told to sit in cars outside nightclubs and singles' bars. The detective – who is survived by his daughter, three sons, 11 grandchildren and two great-great grandchildren – received a promotion of two ranks for cracking the case, moving him from deputy inspector to deputy chief inspector. He retired the following year. His wife Helen died in 2007, aged 87.

Berkowitz is serving six life sentences at Sullivan Correctional Facility in Fallsburg, New York state. He pleaded guilty to the murders and told police he carried out the killings on instructions from a neighbour, Sam, "who really is a man who lived 6,000 years ago". He also said Sam was the Devil and claimed to receive instructions from his labrador, Harvey. "I got the messages

through his dog," Berkowitz said. "He told me to kill."

Following the case, state authorities in New York enacted the so-called Son of Sam laws that prohibit a convict from benefiting financially from their wrongdoing. They did so amid reports that several publishers were trying to offer Berkowitz a book deal. In 2002, Berkowitz, who became a born-again Christian, rejected the chance of parole. Detective Dowd's family said he had little time for television police shows or films. The one exception was *Columbo*, starring Peter Falk as a relentless policeman, invariably wearing a grubby rain coat, who cracks his cases by hard work and sweat. Dowd told his daughter: "That's how it's done."



David Berkowitz is serving six life sentences for murders he committed in New York in the 1970s

World View Ben Lynfield



The Palestinian leadership faces a strategy crisis

With the expected demise of the UN Security Council initiative that seeks to end Israeli occupation and create a Palestinian state by 2017, the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's dilemma is how to keep hopes of statehood alive and himself relevant to his people.

The Palestinian leadership has said repeatedly in recent weeks that applying for membership of the International Criminal Court would follow from any thwarting of the Security Council initiative. But as push comes to shove, Mr Abbas could be reluctant to move towards prosecutions of Israelis for alleged war crimes for fear of the response. This could include massive settlement projects in strategic parts of the West Bank that would further disjoin a Palestinian state, as well as the suspension of tax transfers Israel collects that are essential to the viability of the Palestinian Authority.

"Joining the ICC now would mean breaking all the glasses," says Talal Awkal, a columnist for al-Ayyam newspaper. "Joining would mean we are going into an open conflict with the Israelis without any limits."

But not joining means a further blow to the credibility of an unpopular President whose term expired in 2010 and who has had little, if anything, to show his people after 10 years in office. The US State Department announced late on Sunday that it opposes the resolution submitted by Jordan for the Palestinians, on the grounds that it is "not constructive", sets an "arbitrary" deadline and goes against Israel's security needs. That means the resolution will either fail to gain the required support of nine countries on the Council or, if it does, will be vetoed by Washington.

The final resolution, a variant of a draft shaped by France, called for a "full and phased withdrawal of the Israeli occupying forces" in the West Bank by the end of 2017, took out a reference to Jerusalem as a shared capital of Israel and Palestine, and toughened the position on future borders of the state, refugees and settlements.

The initiative began with a fanfare in October, when the hope was to gain European backing and embarrass the Americans into abstaining rather than vetoing. But rather than a show of international support for the Palestinians, the initiative now seems likely to demonstrate Palestinian weakness and reinforce the sense that Mr Abbas does not have a winning strategy for gaining statehood.

Wadie Abunassar, head of the International Center for Consultations in Haifa, says: "Since the beginning, this initiative has been a reflection of impotence. Even if it were to have been adopted, which was unlikely, so what? Resolutions on Palestine are not implemented and Israel is above international law. But Abbas believed this was his only way of face-saving and of justifying his position as president

Joining the ICC now would mean we are going into an open conflict with the Israelis

of the Palestinians. The Palestinian leadership now has to reflect on its own failure to develop the alternative of a non-violent liberation struggle."

In contrast, Hassan Khreish, deputy speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council says that what is needed is a strategy of "armed struggle" against the occupation, something Mr Abbas ardently opposes. "Israel does not believe in diplomacy," he adds.

Ghassan Khatib, a Palestinian politician who declines to use the word "failure" in describing the initiative, does however criticise the leadership for "very chaotic" behaviour in introducing the draft, then switching and amending the text. He predicts Mr Abbas will not immediately turn to the ICC, but rather would prefer to hold that step in reserve so that he can threaten Israel with it.