Threat Convergence Profile Series

The Haqqani Network

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FFP

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The Fund for Peace Transnational Threats

Threat Convergence Profile Sheet Number 1
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Overview

Background

The Haqqani Network is an insurgent group[1] that operates from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) region of Pakistan. The group has been active mainly in the southeast of Afghanistan—in Paktia, Paktika, Khost, Ghazni Wardak and, occasionally, Kabul provinces. For the past two years, the group has focused on gaining support and control of Kurram Agency, a province of Pakistan not far from Kabul,[2] which is mostly beyond the scope of U.S. drone activity. It is led by Siraj Haqqani, the son of the network's founder, the famous anti-Soviet fighter and former CIA asset, Jalaluddin Haqqani. The Network falls under the larger umbrella of the Taliban, although they maintain their own command and control structures.

Under both Siraj and his father, the Haqqani Network has maintained a national Islamic objective, leaving the global jihad to their partners. It is closely connected to al-Qaeda and other jihadist and extremist groups in Pakistan.[3] The network's goal of defeating the U.S. and foreign forces is not only to take control of Afghanistan, but also to bolster the efforts and morale of global jihadists. The Haqqani Network has been named one of the largest threats to American operations in Afghanistan. Despite the fact that it remains a significant threat to both the U.S.-led collation and the Afghan government, they continue to receive thinly veiled support from the Pakistani military.

Founded by Jalaluddin Haqqani during the Russian invasion of Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Network was been an integral part of insurgent operations from the 1980s to the present day,[4] though Haqqani himself was trained in Pakistan during the 1970s to combat Prime Minister Mohammad Daud Khan, an Afghan politician who overthrew the monarchy of Mohammad Zahir Shah in 1973 to establish Afghanistan as a republic. The group was supported by the United States as well as Pakistan's intelligence service, known as the ISI, while fighting the Russians. Haqqani excelled at coordinating and organizing not only local fighters but also foreign fighters from all over the Muslim world. His organization came to be one of the key outlets for American arms, supplies, and money, distributed by the ISI.[5] During the 1990s, Jalaluddin Haqqani agreed to join the Taliban, eventually achieving the position of Interior Minister.[6] Prior to the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan after 9/11, the U.S. and Pakistan held meetings with Haqqani in Pakistan in an attempt to get him to sever his allegiance to the Taliban. He refused.[7] Additional overtures have been made to Haqqani and his sons since Karzai's administration came to power and those have similarly been rebuffed.[8] Largely the result of the connections and contacts that Jalaluddin Haqqani made during the 1980s, the Haqqani Network is today one of the most well-connected insurgent groups in the region. It is also known for providing substantial monetary compensation in exchange for assistance by the local population.[9] The Haqqanis also earn revenue from criminal enterprises such as the illegal sale of chromite, an iron oxide used in many metal alloys, and timber smuggling and, to a lesser extent, kidnapping and extortion.[10]

The Network also has a strong base within the Zadran tribe (considered to be one of the fiercest in the area), through family connections, although it is not unilaterally supported as the tribe is highly fractionalized. Many Zadran elders who have resisted Haqqani infiltration have been assassinated, leaving elements of the tribe open to exploitation in the absence of effective leadership.[11] There have been clashes and feuds between the Haqqanis and other Zadran warlords in the region.

Challenges to the United States

Since 2004, the U.S. has used drone attacks to target the Haqqani Network inside of Pakistan. However, because the use of drones has not proved to be consistently effective, the U.S. has begun exploring other methods and strategies. One of the strategies currently employed to counter the Haqqani Network and other insurgent groups focuses on building relations with the populations that would support these groups. By putting development resources into these communities, the U.S. and its allies hope to separate the terrorist group from its support base. With infrastructure and security coming from external aid, the communities would no longer have to rely on the insurgents, thus eroding the co-dependent relationship.

Currently, this strategy focuses too little attention on population centers that the Haqqani Network depends on for support and aid has gone mainly to communities that are easier to access. In addition, U.S. forces have relied mainly on interdiction efforts and targeted raids into Haqqani strongholds that have achieved few enduring effects, particularly when attempting to alleviate the network's popular support base in the tribal areas.[12]

In attempting to counter insurgent groups like the Haqqani Network, the U.S. leans on allies in the region for both intelligence and support. However, in the case of Pakistan, they are faced with a continual challenge due to the fragmented nature of the Pakistani government, with various elements covertly supporting groups that the U.S. has deemed as terrorists. For example, the Pakistani military continues to support the Haqqani Network despite its relationship with the U.S.[13] In exchange for this support, the Haqqani network serves as a proxy force and trusted mediator for Pakistani interests in Afghanistan, and within Pakistan itself. In addition, the ISI relies heavily on Haqqani Network to direct and communicate with Pakistani terrorist organizations[14] engaged in attacks against Indian interests in Kashmir and across the subcontinent, including the attack on the Indian Embassy in Kabul in July 2008.[15] The Network has been alerted in the past by the ISI about impending U.S. drone strikes, allowing them to take refuge and shelter in the mountains surrounding the Haqqani camps. The largest challenge for Pakistan however, is that the main group it relies upon to shape both Afghanistan's and the FATA's political landscapes is the same actor that has incubated al-Qaeda and served as an enabler for other forms of militancy, including threatening Islamabad.[16]

The threat that the Haqqani Network poses to the U.S. has grown over the past decade. Its role in attacks on U.S. interests has made it clear and the U.S. understands the message. In the fall of 2007, the U.S. offered a US$50,000 reward for the capture of Siraj Haqqani—today it is US$5million.[17] The rapid growth in the reward offered showcases the importance the U.S. puts on fighting and bringing down the Haqqani Network. The increase also highlights how effective Siraj Haqqani and the entire network have been in their efforts to destabilize the U.S. effort in Afghanistan.

Connections to al-Qaeda and the Taliban

The Haqqani Network is tied closely to both al-Qaeda and the Afghani Taliban, having built working relationships with both groups. During the 1990s, Jalaluddin Haqqani and his network were instrumental in helping Osama bin Laden set up al-Qaeda's infrastructure, including helping to create a stronghold and cave network in the southeast of Afghanistan. He has worked closely with al -Qaeda field commander, Abu Zubaydah, to establish an insurgent presence in Paktia province. The network's connection to al-Qaeda has also given them access to new resources. As al-Qaeda's connections have grown since 2006, Haqqani has benefited. The publicity and notoriety that al-Qaeda has garnered over the past decade has increased the number of jihad fighters heading to Afghanistan, as well as to the Haqqani Network. Foreign fighters play a significant role in the Haqqani Network, with the group facilitating the entry of foreign militants into Afghanistan from Pakistan in substantial numbers, beginning in 2007. Throughout 2008 and 2009, the Haqqani Network increasingly took advantage of Paktika's mountainous terrain, its proximity to its North Waziristan strongholds, and the absence of a pronounced Afghan or Coalition presence to establish support infrastructure and camps.[18]

When foreign fighters arrive in Afghanistan to fight with or be trained by al-Qaeda, they are assisted by facilitators from the Haqqani Network. These facilitators act as guides and liaisons for the outsiders and provide access to everything the fighters require, including transportation, weapons, supplies and shelter. In this capacity, they offer protection to other insurgent and terrorist groups operating in the area. The Network is the backbone of terrorist operations in the FATA region, focusing its attacks in Afghanistan while letting other groups take charge of international attacks. The Network's ability to execute deadly, high-profile attacks in Kabul and the ensuing international press coverage further reinforces foreign patronage of the Haqqani network.[19] The defeat of U.S. forces in Afghanistan is seen as the boost that the wider international jihad needs, as it is believed such a defeat would confer more legitimacy for the group.

The Network's unique role in the region has grown as it is not only is it facilitating foreign fighters coming into the area, but also managing communication between the different insurgent and terrorist groups. "The Haqqani network has long been an essential operational partner for both Pakistan and al-Qaeda, and that both Islamabad and the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP, also known as "the Pakistani Taliban") often rely upon the Haqqanis' good offices to negotiate with one another."[20] It has turned the region into a melting pot of international jihadists. The territory comprising North Waziristan has arguably become the most important safe-haven for al-Qaeda, the Pakistani Taliban (TTP), Kashmiri groups such as Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), as well as others. In essence, it has become the major nexus for international terrorism.[21] The Network is also responsible for the capture of the only American solider currently held captive. Taken in June of 2009, he last appeared on video in May of 2011.[22]

The Haqqani Network believes that the international military commitment to Afghanistan is only short-term. Since security is the primary requirement for any governance or development progress, they believe that maintaining an unstable security environment will prevent effective and lasting progress on any and all fronts.[23]

The Haqqani Network
Timeline

1970s

1971 | 1972 | 1973 | 1974 | 1975 | 1976 | 1977 | 1978 | 1979 | 1980

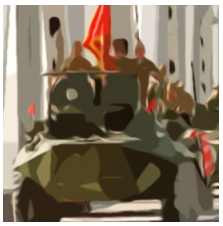
Prime Minister Mohammad Daud Khan overthrows of the monarchy of King Mohammad Zahir Shah in Afghanistan. J. Haqqani and his followers, many of whom were royalists supporting the king, traveled to Pakistan to receive military training to combat Daud's new regime.

The Soviet Union moves into support a communist government after the assignation of PM Daud. Jalaluddin Haqqani establishes a presence in North Waziristan's Miram Shah.

1980s

1981 | 1982 | 1983 | 1984 | 1985 | 1986 | 1987 | 1988 | 1989 | 1990

After moving between several anti-Soviet groups, Haqqani becomes the key Hizb-I Islami-Khalis commander for the Southeast. Jalaluddin Haqqani's role and that of Hizb-i Islami-Khalis grew significantly between 1981 and 1984. Haqqani manages to maintain a great degree of control over the complex tribal regions of Loya-Paktia, and extended his control beyond Zadran tribal areas.

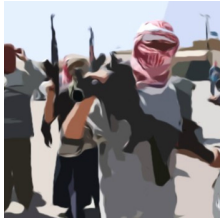


Haqqani's forces seize the cities of Khost and Urgun from the Soviet-backed People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan forces in 1983

1990s

1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000

In 1991 Haqqani is the first resistance leader to capture a city, Khost, from the Najibullah government.



After the fall of Kabul to the Mujahideen in 1992, Haqqani appointed justice minister in the first Mujahideen government.

Just prior to the Taliban's occupation of Kabul, Jalaluddin Haqqani switches his allegiance and goes on to serve as a Taliban military commander north of Kabul. During the Taliban years in power, he serves as the Minister of Borders and Tribal Affairs and governor of Paktia Province.

2000s

2001

In October, 2001, Haqqani named the Taliban's military commander. There is speculation over his role in expediting the escape of Osama Bin Laden.

2002

Assassination attempt on Hamid Karzai on April 27. Three people killed and eleven injured at an open-air military ceremony in Kabul. This is the fourth attempt on Karzai's life.

Kidnapping of British journalist Sean Langan in March. Under the guise of a meeting with the Sirajuddin Haqqani, Langan is captured and held in captivity by members of the Haqqani network for three months.

2003

Bombing of Indian Embassy in Kabul, July 7. A suicide bomber kills 41 and injures over 130 at the Indian Embassy in Kabul. At least four Indian diplomats killed in the attack.

2004

2005

By mid-2005, reports surface that Siraj Haqqani was spearheading the insurgency in Loya-Paktia

Kidnapping of journalist David Rohde, November 10. New York Times journalist David Rohde kidnapped while on assignment outside of Kabul and eventually transferred to Haqqani control.

2006

The Haqqani network assassinates Paktia Governor Hakim Taniwal in September.

2007

2008

Attack on Forward Operating Base Chapman, December 30. Seven Americans, including four CIA officers killed in a suicide attack by a double agent claiming to have information on the whereabouts of senior Haqqani leadership.

Attacks on Afghan Ministries of Justice, Education, and Prison Directorate. February 11. Haqqani forces use a combination of suicide bombers and gunmen attacked three government offices in Kabul, killing at least 26 and injuring over 60.

2009

2010

Kabul bombing on May 18. Eighteen people including five U.S. soldiers and a Canadian soldier killed and fifty-two injured when a NATO convoy is targeted by a suicide attacker. Attack allegedly carried out by the Haqqani network.

2010s

2011

Kabul Bank. February 19. Over 40 people killed when seven armed gunmen and suicide bombers attack the offices of a bank in Kabul.

Attacks on U.S.-funded road construction projects across Afghanistan. In May, over 35 killed at a construction camp outside of Gardez. In March a similar attack against a construction camp kills 24 and wounds 50 in Paktia.

Hotel-Intercontinental Kabul. June 28. Twelve Afghans killed and eight wounded during a brazen nighttime attack on the Hotel-Intercontinental Kabul. This raid is one of the first times Taliban and Haqqani insurgents engaged in a nighttime commando attack.

Combat Post Sayed Abad, Wardak Province, Afghanistan September 10. Over 77 U.S. soldiers and 17 Afghans injured.

U.S. Embassy Kabul and NATO Headquarters, September 12. At least 16 people killed, including 5 Afghan police officers and 11 civilians, including at least 6 children on an attack against the Embassy and NATO.

Current Status

Recent Events

It was announced on October 1, 2011 by the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) that Haji Mali Khan, who is also uncle to the Haqqani network's leader, Sirajuddin "Siraj" Haqqani, was seized during an operation in porous border of the eastern Paktia province.[24] Because of his central roll to Haqqani operations, the fact that he was taken alive makes his loss potentially much more consequential for the group. He is an example of how "capture" can be more effective then "kill."[25] It is believed that the channels of communication have already been opened between the Haqqani Network and the United States. U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton has publically announced a willingness to talk stating, in essence, that today's enemy can as well be tomorrow's interlocutor in the search for peace.

Future

Though the U.S. and ISAF have made progress combating the Haqqani Network and its allies, especially with the apprehension of Haji Mali Khan, it remains a persistent and imminent threat. It is not a threat that the U.S. will be able to eradicate if Pakistan continues to rely on the Network to shape events and politics in Afghanistan although U.S. leverage in this area is questionable. Being unable to rely on allies in the region weakens U.S. ability to effectively implement counter insurgency efforts and continuing to pressure Pakistan to cut ties with the insurgency network should remain a priority, no matter how difficulty realized.

The U.S. also needs to focus its efforts on strategies that have proven to be more effective. With the knowledge that Pakistan military uses the Haqqani Network as a proxy, the U.S. needs to work with other partners to counter the threat it poses. The infrastructure and security development that the U.S. has begun to implement has not been effective in reaching the communities that support the Haqqani Network and should be targeted, through reliable international and local aid groups to reach those most in need This could go a substantial way in eroding popular support for the network although the ability of the U.S. and its allies to bolster or shore up legitimate government support is an ill-advised strategy. Until these strategies are implemented correctly and expanded appropriately, the Haqqani Network will continue to serve as a major force of radicalization and destabilization to U.S. efforts in Afghanistan and the region at large.

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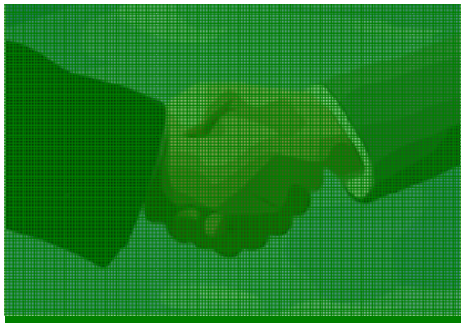
Conflict Early Warning and Assessment

Transnational Threats



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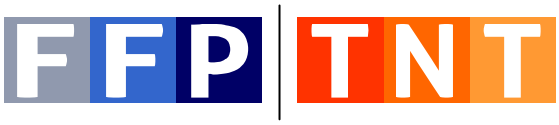
- raise the profile of the challenges in vulnerable, fragile and ungoverned regions on the nonproliferation agenda;
- explore how these regions may serve as enabling environments for nuclear terrorism;
- promote more coherent and strategic policy approaches to nuclear terrorism and illicit nuclear trafficking; and
- become a hub for threat convergence-related analysis.

The program encourages innovative and fresh approaches to the issue by convening experts, performing extensive field research in some of the world's most difficult environments, and by partnering with international and regional organizations to explore how the threat of catastrophic terrorism emanating from weak and failing states can be prevented.



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