

# American Foreign Policy Council



## TALIBAN

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### QUICK FACTS

Geographical Areas of Operation: Europe, South Asia

Numerical Strength (Members): Estimated in the tens of thousands

Leadership: Muhammed Omar, Abdul Ghani Baradar,

Religious Identification: Sunni Islam

(Quick Facts courtesy of the U.S. State Department's Country Reports on Terrorism)

*After decades of intra-state conflict, social and economic crisis, and external meddling, Afghanistan resembled a broken skeleton of its former self by the early 1990s. The societal shifts occurring in Afghan society during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s led to the militarization of Afghan society, promoting both self-styled resistance leaders and galvanizing the role of the mullah, or Islamic teacher, to statuses traditionally reserved for tribal leaders and wealthy land owners. The bloody conduct of the Soviet-Afghan war (1980-89) led to widespread destruction of Afghanistan's social and physical infrastructure: more than one-third of all Afghans became refugees in neighboring Pakistan or Iran and civil war quickly erupted following the violent end of the Soviet-backed Najibullah regime in 1992.<sup>1</sup> The ensuing chaos and banditry led to public demand for law and order. In response, a little known former resistance fighter named Mullah Mohammad Omar, and his Taliban ("religious students") led a brief but well-received campaign to rid southern Afghanistan's Kandahar region of its predatory commanders and bandits in the spring of 1994.*

*News quickly spread throughout southern Afghanistan of Mullah Omar and his band of puritanical justice-seeking vigilantes. With logistical and financial help from Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and manpower provided by religiously-indoctrinated Afghan refugees living in Pakistan's tribal areas, the Taliban movement spread through Afghanistan like wildfire. Following the Taliban's*

*seizure of Kabul in 1996, the Taliban began to host a number of outlawed Islamist terrorist networks, including Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda and a number of Kashmiri Islamist movements. Their influence shaped the Taliban's internal and external policies, which ultimately created rifts and divisions among the Taliban's clerical leadership. By 2000, the Taliban regime was largely at war with itself. Refusing to give in to U.S. demands to hand over Osama bin Laden following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, Mullah Mohammad Omar's reign of power ended shortly after the U.S.-led coalition attacked Afghanistan and toppled the Taliban regime.*

*Many of the Taliban's top leadership including Mullah Omar, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, Mullah Dadullah and Mullah Obaidullah slipped over the border into Pakistan and reestablished an ad hoc command-and-control center in the Pashtunabad neighborhood of Quetta, earning the moniker "the Quetta Shura" from U.S. and Afghan intelligence agencies. The Taliban slowly manifested itself into a more organized, centralized, and capable organization, and by 2006 launched a protracted campaign of violence and intimidation throughout Afghanistan's southern and eastern provinces. Similarly, a Pakistani off-shoot of the Taliban emerged as several tribal shuras supportive of the Afghan Taliban pledged bayat (allegiance) to Mullah Omar and began cross-border attacks providing manpower, weapons and logistical support to insurgent fronts in eastern Afghanistan and beyond. The tempo of the insurgency has continued to increase on both sides of the border, prompting U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan to conduct a "surge" of additional manpower and weaponry into the region beginning in 2009 and completed by September 2010. In a 2010 NATO summit in Lisbon, the U.S. and NATO allies announced they would soon end the combat mission in Afghanistan, draw down international forces, and transfer security responsibilities to Afghan security forces by December 2014. In September 2012, the U.S. removed its portion of 33,000 surge troops to meet that timeframe. In Spring 2013, the U.S. and allied forces handed over security responsibilities of the bulk of Afghan provinces from international forces to Afghan control but continue to provide significant support to the Afghan security forces.*

## **HISTORY AND IDEOLOGY**

Rising from the ashes of Afghanistan's devastating three-year civil war (1992-1994), the puritanical Islamist Taliban movement emerged in Afghanistan in 1994 and, following a ruthlessly effective military campaign, came to dominate the country from 1996 to 2001. Their victory led to the draconian implementation of *sharia* (Islamic Law) and the transformation of Afghanistan into a safe haven for international terrorist organizations such as *Harakat ul-Mujahideen* (HUM) and al-Qaeda. The original organization can be best described as a reactionary security force inspired by the breakdown

in social order and stability, the main objectives of which were to disarm unruly commanders and their predatory militias and to impose order based on Islamic doctrine. The core of the original Taliban movement originated from a clerical *andiwal* (war comrades) network of Islamic conservatives, made up of *madrassa*-educated ethnic Pashtun men from poor or lower class backgrounds.

During its formation in the 1990s, the Taliban successfully transcended tribal and cultural norms, representing a strict form of Sunni Islam based on Deobandi doctrine, a dogmatic form of Islam originating in northern India that reinforces the Islamic ethical code.<sup>2</sup> Although the Taliban was mostly drawn from Afghanistan's largest ethnic group, the Pashtun, and from the predominantly Pashtun Kandahar region, tribal lineage overall had very little to do with its formation. The Taliban members have come from both Durrani and Ghilzai tribes, which have been known to compete and clash due to internal rivalries. Additionally, the movement initially tried to appeal to all of Afghanistan's ethnicities, including Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras, and at least one Tajik sat on its *majlis-shura* (leadership council).<sup>3</sup> Uzbeks and northern Badakhshi Afghans were reportedly in charge of local Taliban missions in Paktia province.<sup>4</sup> However, the Taliban was, and still remains, overwhelmingly a Pashtun movement.

The most prominent characteristic of the Taliban, aside from its Deobandi interpretation of Islam, is its class make-up. Early manifestations of the Taliban were comprised of local religious clerics who typically grew up in Afghanistan's rural and poor environs.<sup>5</sup> With little education and few literate commanders, the Taliban was responsible for gross mismanagement and a misunderstanding of how to govern once the movement began to seize territory. Although the movement represented a socio-religious military organization, the Taliban consisted of several additional overlapping components and sponsors.

Within six months of liberation of Kandahar province by Mullah Omar, the government of Pakistan, whose economic interests in Afghanistan revolved around securing trade routes to the newly independent Central Asian states, sought Taliban security for a military convoy of goods destined for Turkmenistan as it traversed through the Spin Boldak-Chaman border crossing in Kandahar province. The Taliban successfully rescued the Pakistani convoy from the control of a local warlord at the Kandahar airfield, and as Mullah Omar and his vigilante militia began to spread their influence throughout Afghanistan, Pakistan's security apparatus – the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and the military – together with the Pashtun “trucking mafia” located in Quetta, offered the Taliban logistical and financial aid to help secure the

roadways. The Taliban also began to incorporate some former Afghan communist regime elements, particularly those loyal to former Afghan Defense Minister Shahnawaz Tanai, who remained under ISI protection in Peshawar. Through the ISI's help, Tanai allegedly mobilized his network of former military subordinates, whose technical and combat skills supported the Taliban's thrust toward Kabul.<sup>6</sup> Some government functionaries were kept in place at the local level while a Taliban representative oversaw and managed the day-to-day operations to ensure that the government acted within the boundaries of *sharia*.

Most of the original Taliban leadership came from the same three southern provinces—Kandahar, Uruzgan and Helmand—and nearly all of them fought under one of the two main clerical resistance parties during the war against the Soviets: Hezb-i-Islami (Khalis) and Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi's Harakat-I Ineqelab-ye Islami. Most of the Taliban *ulema* (religious scholars and clerics) had completed their studies at Deobandi *madrassas* in Pakistan's Northwestern Frontier Province, one of the most famous being the Dar-ul-Uloom Haqqania located in Akora Khattak. Experts estimate that almost all of the Taliban leaders and cadres, as well as over 70 percent of the leaders and cadres of the Sunni Islamist movements Harakat ul-Mujahideen (HUM), Jaish-i-Mohammad (JEM), Lashkar-e-Taiba (LET), Lashkar-i-Jhangvi (LEJ), and Sipah-e-Saheba Pakistan (SSP), are products of these *madrassas*.

The original Taliban has accurately been described as a “caravan to which different people attached themselves for various reasons.”<sup>8</sup> This description remains largely accurate today. During an interview in 2006, Afghanistan's former Interior Minister, Ali Ahmad Jalali, offered one of the most poignant descriptions of the post-2001 Taliban movement, calling it “an assortment of ideologically motivated Afghan and foreign militants, disillusioned tribal communities, foreign intelligence operatives, drug traffickers, opportunist militia commanders, disenchanting and unemployed youth, and self-interested spoilers... more of a political alliance of convenience than an ideological front.”<sup>9</sup> The Taliban's former ambassador to Pakistan, Mullah Abdul Salam Zaef, now under house arrest in Kabul, stated the group does not refer to its fighters as Taliban, but as *mujahedeen*, because only one in ten fighters is a true Taliban, while the rest are “ordinary Afghans.”<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, the question of just who the Taliban *is* continues to baffle analysts and pundits alike. Some experts interpret the movement as a loose network of militants based along tribal lineage, some describe the Taliban as a Pakistani-created and funded proxy army, while others suggest the Taliban are an umbrella organization of various militant networks, marginalized tribes and

clans, criminal gangs, some of whom pledge allegiance to the core element of the former Taliban government, Mullah Mohammad Omar and the so-called *Quetta Shura*. The organizational construct of the Taliban movement in Afghanistan, its offshoots, and its Pakistani extension, the *Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan*, are presented below.

*Quetta Shura Taliban* (QST): The remnants of the former Taliban government manifested itself as the *Quetta Shura* in 2002, named after the Pakistani city where Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, sought refuge following his ouster from Afghanistan. Initially, the movement consisted of a ten man *Rahbari Shura* (Leadership Council) consisting of eight old guard Taliban military commanders from southern Afghanistan and one from Paktika and another from Paktia provinces.<sup>11</sup> In March 2003, Mullah Omar expanded the *Rahbari Shura* to include a total of 33 commanders and later, in October 2006, announced the creation of the *majlis al-shura* (Consultative Council) consisting of 13 members and some additional “advisers.”<sup>12</sup>

Since that time, the *Quetta Shura* has become far more complex. As the Taliban began to spread its influence and gain *de facto* control of some rural areas in southern Afghanistan, the *Quetta Shura* began assigning shadow government positions to various areas and regions with heavy Taliban footprint and support. The *Quetta Shura* ballooned in size, likely because of its effort to manage and bring some organizational efficiency to what was and essentially is a franchise of tribal and communal networks with loose ideological and physical relations. According to several documents published by the Taliban between April 2008 and May 2009, the Taliban has created additional councils to perform specific tasks; these are managed under the Supreme Leadership of Mullah Omar.

The Taliban outlined the structure of its organization in an official statement published in the insurgent magazine *Al Samood* in the spring of 2008.<sup>13</sup> While some view the manifesto as nothing more than an attempt by the Taliban to portray itself as a unified organization capable of running the state, it nevertheless outlines the nine councils that make up the *Quetta Shura* Taliban: the Military Commander’s Council, Ulema Council, Military Council, Financial Council, Political Council, Cultural Council, Invitation (Recruitment) Council, Training and Education Council, and the Council of Affairs of the Prisoner’s and Martyr’s Families. The latter two are thought to exist in theory only.

The *Quetta Shura* is centered on its Supreme Leadership head, Mullah Mohammad Omar, and his military and political deputy Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, best known under his *nom de guerre* Mullah Baradar Akhund,

and a series of military councils, which in turn help facilitate the functioning of the Taliban's four regional zones. Mullah Baradar, the Taliban's most competent and respected military commander, was captured in a covert ISI-CIA sting operation in Karachi, Pakistan in early February 2010.<sup>14</sup> (He was subsequently released by Pakistan in September 2013). The Taliban's operational command over daily events is now led by a seasoned field commander from Helmand province: Mullah Ghulam Rasoul, better known as Mullah Abdul Zakir; and his deputy, Mullah Abdul Rauf Alizai. Both Zakir and Abdul Rauf were detained by U.S. forces operating in Afghanistan in late 2001 and sent to the military detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Following tribunal hearings, both Zakir and Rauf were repatriated to Afghanistan on December 12, 2007 before corrupt officials facilitated their release from custody in early 2008.<sup>15</sup> Maulawi Abdul Kabir, a senior Taliban leader from Nangarhar and close confidant of Mullah Mohammad Omar, is head of the Peshawar Shura and acts as a liaison to the Taliban-affiliated Haqqani Network.

Each of the Taliban's zones is broken down geographically as follows: the *Quetta Shura* is responsible for insurgent activities in Kandahar, Uruzgan, Farah, Zabul, Nimroz and parts of Helmand provinces. The Peshawar Shura, led by Maulawi Abdul Kabir, is thought to influence operations in Nangarhar, Laghman, Kunar, Nuristan, Logar, Kabul, Wardak provinces, and possibly areas in the northeast. The Miram Shah Shura is run out of North Waziristan and its military head is Siraj "Khalifa" Haqqani; its area of responsibility includes Paktia, Paktika, Khost, parts of Nangarhar, Logar, Wardak, Ghazni and Kabul. The Girdi Jungle Shura, named after the large refugee camp located in Baluchistan province of Pakistan, is responsible for activities in Helmand province. Although the Taliban may have distinct networks operating throughout the country—for example, the Haqqani Network, which enjoys a great deal of tactical autonomy—it is clear most of these groups share many political and ideological objectives.

*Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan:* Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan is an umbrella front bringing together rogue resistance organizations like Lashkar-e Jhangvi, Jaish-e Muhammad, Sipah-e Sahaba Pakistan, and possibly some of the banned Kashmiri groups like Harakat ul-Mujahedin.<sup>16</sup> Though the group was officially formed in 2007, its seeds were sown as early as 2001 as a result of Afghan-Pakistani militant communication and collaboration.

Following the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001, Taliban supporters and sympathizers in Pakistan's western tribal areas quickly pledged support and provided additional manpower and resources to help the Afghan Taliban resistance. The Pashtun tribes who dominate the western tribal agen-

cies of Pakistan share ancestral lineages with many of Afghanistan's Pashtun tribesmen and both have long resisted colonial attempts at occupation. Even in a modern context, the core of the Afghan resistance movement against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was based in these same areas, using Peshawar as a *de facto* capital and the tribal agencies of North and South Waziristan as training areas and key junctions for transiting personnel and weapons into Afghanistan.

The initial flow of Taliban fighters into Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) became a tidal wave following the collapse of the Taliban regime in Kandahar and after the monumental battle of Tora Bora in December 2001 and the subsequent spring 2002 battle of the Shah-i-kot Valley (Operation Anaconda). Along with the Taliban came hundreds of fleeing Arab and foreign fighters linked to al-Qaeda, many of whom settled among their Pashtun supporters and sympathizers in North and South Waziristan. Many of these supporters had voluntarily fought against the Soviet army during the 1980s under the clerical-led *mujahedeen* factions Hezb-i-Islami (Khalis) and Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi's Harakat-i Ineqelab-ye Islami. Following the Soviet withdrawal and subsequent collapse of the Afghan communist regime in 1992, many of the Pakistani volunteers returned to their villages following the start of the civil war.

One of the earliest networks in place to support the Taliban and al-Qaeda's exodus from Afghanistan was the Tehrik-e Nafaz-e Shariat-e Muhammadi (Movement for the Enforcement of Muhammadan *Sharia* Law or TSNM). Founded in 1992 in the Malakand tribal agency, the TSNM has fought for the implementation of *sharia* throughout the FATA and North Western Frontier Province and has shared ideological tenants with the Afghan Taliban. The TSNM has taken root in Bajur Agency, sheltering al-Qaeda fugitives and sponsoring a new generation of militants throughout the Salafi *madrassa* network under their charismatic leader Maulana Faqir Mohammad. The second most important bastion for Taliban fighters, supporters and sympathizers is North and South Waziristan. Home of the legendary *mujahedeen* commander Jalaluddin Haqqani, North Waziristan is also the operational space of many al-Qaeda leaders and the network of Hafiz Gul Bahadur.

These networks were largely disorganized although supportive of the Afghan Taliban from 2001-2004. The U.S. successfully killed one of the main militant commanders in the region in 2004 when missiles launched from a Predator drone slammed into a compound housing Nek Mohammad Wazir. Similar to the Afghan Taliban's approach, tribal leaders and influential *khans* were systematically targeted and killed by militants, replacing the traditional power systems with those of mullahs and militia commanders.

Baitullah Mehsud soon emerged as a charismatic Pakistani version of Mullah Omar. Young, radical but oddly unschooled in Islamic *madrassas*, Baitullah hailed from the Mehsud tribe and gained prominence in February 2005 when he signed a “peace accord” with the Pakistani government.<sup>17</sup> As part of that deal, Baitullah pledged not to support al-Qaeda and restrained his forces from attacking Pakistani state targets and military targets in exchange for the end of Pakistani military operations in South Waziristan. The deal disintegrated in 2006, leaving South Waziristan a largely independent militarized zone where Taliban officials and al-Qaeda leaders found sanctuary. Baitullah Mehsud commanded a core of 5,000 hardened loyalists, mostly tribally affiliated Mehsud kinsmen, launching spectacular raids and ambushes against the superior Pakistani military forces.<sup>18</sup>

On December 14, 2007, a militant spokesman announced the formation of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Baitullah Mehsud was appointed the *amir* of the TTP’s forty-man *shura*; Hafiz Gul Bahadur was appointed as the *naib amir* (deputy); and Maulana Faqir Mohammad of the Bajaur Agency was appointed third in command.<sup>19</sup> The group quickly entrenched its supporters throughout all of FATA’s seven tribal agencies as well as the settled Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) districts of Swat, Bannu, Tank, Lakki Marwat, Dera Ismail Khan, Kohistan, Buner and Malakand.<sup>20</sup> The TTP consolidated their objectives to enforcing *sharia* throughout the FATA, uniting against NATO forces in Afghanistan by supporting Mullah Omar’s Afghan Taliban, seeking to remove Pakistani military checkpoints from the FATA, and vowing to protect the Swat district and Waziristan from future Pakistani military operations. Following the Pakistani government’s siege of the Red Mosque in Islamabad in July 2007,<sup>21</sup> Baitullah Mehsud and the TTP turned their guns on the Pakistani government. The following month, forces loyal to Mehsud humiliated the Pakistani military when they ambushed and captured 200 government soldiers.<sup>22</sup> Subsequently, the assassination of Pakistan’s former two-time Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in December 2007 reverberated around the world and drew considerable attention to the deteriorating security situation in Pakistan.

The Pakistani government quickly blamed Baitullah Mehsud and the TTP for orchestrating the assassination of Bhutto, offering transcripts of alleged phone conversations with Mehsud and his operatives discussing the attack, a claim Mehsud and the TTP strongly denied.<sup>23</sup> Rifts between rival commanders under the TTP banner impacted the organization’s unity throughout 2008, eventually leading to major disputes between Hafiz Gul Bahadur, Baitullah Mehsud and Maulvi Nazir. The situation worsened after nine tribal elders allied with Maulavi Nazir were gunned down by TTP militiamen



linked to Baitullah Mehsud and Uzbek forces loyal to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan *amir* Tahir Yuldashev. An increase in U.S. drone strikes targeting militants in North and South Waziristan strained the TTP as top and mid-level leaders were liquidated throughout 2008 and 2009 and scores more arrested and dispersed in 2010. The Pakistani military moved on the TTP and the TSNM in Bajur and Swat, prompting a closer cooperation among militants who renewed their vows of union in February 2009 when they formed the *Shura-Ittehad-al-Mujahedeen* (United Mujahedeen Council) which again brought Hafiz Gul Bahadur, Baitullah Mehsud, Maulavi Nazir and Siraj Haqqani together.

Major Pakistani military ground operations (Operation Rah-e Nijat) targeted the TTP in South Waziristan in October 2009 and concluded by April 2010. Beginning in October 2009, the Pakistani military launched a major offensive against Taliban strongholds in South Waziristan. The symbolic village of Makeen, the hometown of Baitullah Mehsud, as well as Ladha, Kotkai, Kaniguram, and Sararogha were the primary targets of the operation.<sup>24</sup> Pakistani Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani at the time announced the completion of the ground offensive on December 19, 2009. He claimed that 589 Taliban fighters and their supporters were killed in the offensive and that 79 Pakistani soldiers also died from combat.<sup>25</sup>

Just prior to the South Waziristan operation, an American UAV strike killed Baitullah Mehsud, his second wife, and several of his bodyguards on August 5, 2009. A chaotic rebuttal from TTP spokesmen denied his death but within two weeks, and following an alleged power struggle within the TTP for the top leadership position, the TTP acknowledged Mehsud's death and announced Hakimullah Mehsud as his replacement. The TTP also acknowledged the new second-in-command, Waliur Rehman, and other top positions to Maulana Faqir Mohammad and Qari Hussein Mehsud, the movement's top suicide-bomber facilitator. In January 2010, media reports indicated that Hakimullah Mehsud was reportedly killed in or as a result of a drone strike in South Waziristan.<sup>26</sup> Subsequently, the TTP released a series of audio messages from Hakimullah and he soon appeared in a 43-minute videotaped interview submitted to a global media outlet proving he survived the attack.<sup>27</sup>

To date, no major Pakistani military operation has occurred in North Waziristan, a key point the United States continues to push with Pakistani officials. However, according to Abdul Basit, Pakistani Foreign Office spokesman at the time, "any decision regarding the launch of an operation in North Waziristan will be determined by Pakistan alone, and will depend on the security situation in the area."<sup>28</sup>

*The Haqqani Network:* Once a key recipient of U.S. funding and arms during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, Jalaluddin Haqqani has maintained his status as a prominent *mujahideen* commander who holds sway in several southeastern provinces in Afghanistan. His power and prestige has largely surpassed that of the Taliban's leader Mullah Omar, especially among Haqqani's Zadran tribe in eastern Afghanistan. However, it is Jalaluddin's oldest son, Sirajuddin, who may have gained the most prominence. Siraj, also known as "Khalifa," has been described by U.S. military officials as "one of the most influential insurgent commanders in eastern Afghanistan," who has "eclipsed his father in power and influence and is said to rival Mullah Omar for the Taliban leadership."<sup>29</sup>

The Haqqani Network is based out of a Taliban bastion in neighboring Pakistan. The village of Dande Darpa Khel near Miramshah (North Waziristan) is its main headquarters, while Zambar village in the northern Sabari district in Khost province serves as the group's major operations hub.<sup>30</sup> The group also maintains a major presence in the Zadran dominated districts between Paktia and Paktika provinces, which also serve as a major transit point for insurgents piercing into Logar province and southern Kabul. The Haqqani family owned and operated an extremist *madrassa* in the Dande Darpa Khel village just north of Miram Shah before the Pakistani military launched a raid and shut it down in September 2005 and subsequent U.S. drone strikes destroyed its two main compounds and killed scores of Haqqani relatives and fighters in September 2008.

The Haqqanis belong to the eastern Zadran tribe, as does the commander of the Taliban's "eastern zone," Maulavi Abdul Kabir, a veteran Taliban official and military commander closely associated with Mullah Omar. The Haqqanis hold clout on both sides of the border and through Siraj's leadership, the group provides a critical bridge to Pakistani Taliban groups and al-Qaeda linked foreign fighters. The elder Haqqani's past relationship with the Pakistani intelligence apparatus, the Inter-Service Intelligence or ISI, has virtually guaranteed Jalaluddin's freedom of movement on the Pakistan side of the border as several failed operations against him have proven. Electronic signal intercepts by U.S. and Indian intelligence agencies reportedly confirm a link between ISI officers and Haqqani operatives who are said to have jointly planned and executed the deadly suicide car bomb attack against Indian embassy in Kabul on July 7, 2008.<sup>31</sup>

Jalaluddin Haqqani, never part of the original Taliban movement of Mullah Omar, was franchised into the Taliban in 1996 as the religious militia neared his stronghold of Paktia. Since then, he (and later his oldest son Siraj

Haqqani) has pledged *bayat* (allegiance) to Mullah Omar, becoming the Minister of Tribal and Border Affairs, the Governor of Paktia and eventually the Taliban's overall military commander under Taliban's regime. In 2003, Jalaluddin led the Taliban's strategy for the eastern zone. Suspected of suffering from lupus for some time, the elderly Haqqani handed the reins of his terror network over to his son Siraj in 2007 after coming down with serious health concerns.

Afghanistan's intelligence service, the National Directorate of Security (NDS), began to circulate rumors of Jalaluddin's death in the summer of 2007. The Taliban spokesmen rebuffed several journalists' queries at the time, neither confirming nor denying the rumors. At this point, Siraj became the Taliban's overlord for three provinces—Paktia, Paktika and Khost—although each province now has separate Taliban shadow provincial governors, with Siraj serving as “regional governor” for the tri-province area known locally as Loya Paktia. According to U.S. military officials, operations by the U.S. Special Forces against the Taliban and the Haqqani Network increased substantially in 2010, resulting in 900 low and mid-level commanders being arrested or killed.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, Pakistani officials reportedly arrested Nasiruddin Haqqani, a top financier and son of Jalaluddin Haqqani, in late December 2010 as he traveled from Peshawar to Miram Shah in North Waziristan.<sup>33</sup>

A series of complex assaults against Afghan government and economic institutions in Kabul, Jalalabad, and Khost cities have been attributed to the Haqqani Network and its “Kabul Strike Group,” a shadowy guerrilla front that plans and conducts sophisticated attacks that often include a commando style raid with suicide-bombers against urban targets. On February 19, 2011, a brazen day-light attack against Jalalabad's main bank, which involved gunmen and suicide bombers dressed as border police, killed at least 42 people and wounded more than 70 in one of the deadliest attacks ever carried out by the Haqqani Network.<sup>34</sup>

Past attacks attributed to the Haqqani Network include the multi-pronged assault on two Afghan ministries and a prison headquarters in Kabul that left 19 people dead and more than 50 wounded; an 11-man commando-style suicide bombing raid against several government facilities in Khost City; and the July 4, 2009 assault against a remote U.S. outpost in Paktika's Zerok district that killed two U.S. soldiers and injured four others. On July 21, 2009, suicide bombers armed with rocket-propelled grenades and assault rifles attacked government installations and a U.S. base in the cities of Gardez and Jalalabad. However, one of the most brazen attacks attributed to the Haqqani Network occurred in Kabul on October 4, 2009 when terrorists dressed in police uniforms assassinated the security guard protecting the UN's guest

house and stormed the facility, eventually detonating several suicide vests and killing at least twelve people, including six UN personnel. The deadly suicide bombing of an CIA forward operating base in Khost on December 30, 2009 that killed seven senior CIA operatives and a Jordanian intelligence officer has been speculatively attributed to the Haqqani Network, the TTP and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Most recently, in June 2013, Haqqani Network fighters staged a large-scale coordinated attack with 13 suicide bombers on two high-profile Afghan government targets, including the Kabul International Airport. In September 2012, the U.S. formally designated the Haqqani Network as a foreign terrorist organization.

*Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin* (Party of Islam): A young Islamist named Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a Kharoti Pashtun from the northern Afghan province of Kunduz, formed the Hezb-i-Islami - Gulbuddin political faction in Pakistan in 1976 in response to the growing influence of leftist movements in the Afghan government and university campuses. During the 1980s, Hekmatyar, along with guidance from Pakistan's intelligence services and financial assistance from U.S. and Saudi intelligence services, propelled Hezb-i-Islami into the biggest mujahedeen organization fighting against the Soviet occupation. Hekmatyar is infamous for his brutal battlefield tactics and backstabbing political deals, including the assassination of many of his political rivals.<sup>35</sup>

His reign of terror also included the shelling of Kabul during the 1992-1994 Afghan civil war, one of the only known instances when an acting prime minister bombarded his own capital. During the rise of the Taliban, Hekmatyar lost several of his key strongholds and weapons dumps, including the Spin Boldak armory in Kandahar in 1994 and Charasayab, a region south of Kabul, before being exiled to Iran following the Taliban's capture of Kabul in 1996. Many of Hekmatyar's loyalists sought refuge in Pakistan during Taliban period, although some commanders and militiamen folded into the Taliban government. After the U.S.-led intervention in Afghanistan in 2001, Hekmatyar secretly left his sanctuary in Mashhad, Iran, and has remained a fugitive ever since, floating between the tribal areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan and orchestrating attacks against the Afghan government and international forces. Hekmatyar has reactivated some of his loyal cadres in northern and eastern Afghanistan, namely in the provinces of Takhar, Badakshan, Baghlan, Nangarhar, Kabul, Logar, Laghman, Kunar, Nuristan, Wardak and parts of Paktia, Paktika and Khost.

The U.S. military has estimated Hekmatyar's forces to number around 400-600, although experts suggest the number is more likely to total around 1,500 full-time fighters.<sup>36</sup> Hezb-i-Islami cadres have fallen out of favor

with many Taliban fronts at the local level, with violent clashes and killings attributed to both sides occurring throughout 2010.<sup>37</sup> Unlike the Taliban, Hezb-i-Islami leaders have participated in clandestine and overt talks with the Afghan government since 2009, both abroad and in Afghanistan an indicator the group is militarily weakened and biding its time for a political rebirth and to bolster its rank-and-file. In February 2013, the U.S. Department of State designated Gulbuddin Hekmatyar as a “terrorist.” Hezb-i-Islami – Hekmatyar loyalists are politically active in the current Afghan government led by Hamid Karzai with several occupying important cabinet level positions, including Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal as the Minister of Economy, and Karim Khurram as President Karzai’s Chief of Staff.

## GLOBAL REACH

The Afghan Taliban movement has restricted its area of operations to attacks within the borders of Afghanistan, although violent clashes in the frontier areas with Iran and Tajikistan have been occasionally reported. These clashes are likely smuggling operations gone awry as Afghanistan’s frontier regions with Iran and Tajikistan are well-established narcotics and weapons smuggling routes. Occasionally, Afghan Taliban leaders have threatened attacks against NATO countries whose soldiers are operating in Afghanistan, namely Germany, Spain and the UK; although none of the terrorist attacks in any of these countries have ever been attributed to the Taliban.<sup>38</sup> In the fall of 2009, the Taliban made an effort to promote a new “foreign policy” by releasing several statements on their website declaring the movement poses no regional or international security threat. The Taliban’s leader, Mullah Omar, repeated this rhetoric in one of his two annual *Eid* statements to the Afghan people, which appeared in mid-November 2010.<sup>39</sup>

The Pakistani Taliban or TTP, especially following the Baitullah Mehsud’s reign of terror between 2007 and 2009, have shown interest in not only attacking the Afghan government and security targets but also Pakistani state institutions and security targets. On several occasions in 2008 and 2009, Baitullah Mehsud threatened to launch attacks against international targets, including the White House.<sup>40</sup> On January 19, 2009, Spanish authorities seized 14 suspected associates of the TTP in Barcelona on suspicion of plotting a series of suicide-bomb attacks, which were to coincide with the run-up to the March 9 parliamentary elections and the March 11 anniversary of the Madrid commuter train bombings.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, the TTP claimed credit for the April 4, 2009 shooting attack at an immigration center in Binghamton, New York where 13 people lost their lives to a lone gunman.<sup>42</sup> However, investigators quickly identified the gunman as a deranged Vietnamese immigrant with no ties to international terrorist groups or radical Islamist move-

ments.

On May 1, 2010, Faisal Shahzad, a Pakistani-American, made a failed attempt to explode a car bomb in Times Square in New York City. Shortly after, in an interview with NBC's "Meet the Press," U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder said that based on the initial evidence collected, Shahzad was working with the Pakistani Taliban and that the movement directed the plot.

Mehsud's close association with Arab al-Qaeda leaders and Uzbek militants in South Waziristan partially explained his global-*jihadist* rhetoric. Following his death in August 2009, the TTP's *shura* struggled to nominate a new leader that pleased both the Pashtun tribal constituency and the more global minded *jihadists* of al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda's influence won out, and Hakimullah Mehsud, the radical TTP commander of the Orakzai Agency, became the new *amir* for the TTP. Hakimullah ordered a number of deadly attacks against Pakistani and U.S. military targets in the region with some reports indicating he helped facilitate the suicide bombing attack against a U.S. intelligence base in eastern Khost province of Afghanistan.<sup>43</sup> The deadly attack killed eight CIA officers and left six others severely injured on December 28, 2009.

## RECENT ACTIVITY

Since the Taliban's formation in 1994, their capture of Kabul two years later, and their eviction by international forces in late 2001, the group has significantly altered and redefined its organizational, political and ideological constructs. The Taliban has reconstituted itself partly based on criminal activities such as extortion, kidnapping for ransom, and participating in Afghanistan's burgeoning narcotics industry. Although there is little evidence to suggest the Taliban is directly involved in the cultivation, processing and distribution of narcotics, it is clear the Taliban benefits from taxing the industry through religious taxes like *ushr* and "voluntary donations" such as *zakat*.

In May 2010, the Taliban issued a third edition of their *layeha*, or "code of conduct," in an effort to strengthen unity among the rank-and-file, low level commanders, and the provincial military councils that are active throughout the country. Most of the new regulations were organizational directives seeking to establish provincial and district level commissions that oversee the political and military conduct of Taliban fighters, and offer directions on establishing "complaint" councils that allow local residents to communicate any grievances or allegations of abuse committed in the name of the Taliban to an authoritative council that would subsequently launch an investigation into the matter.

In late 2009, U.S. and NATO military officials estimated there were approximately 25,000 full-time Taliban fighters now operating in Afghanistan, up from 7,000 in 2006.<sup>44</sup> Outside observers estimate the size of the Taliban to be around 20,000 members, although some reach higher estimates of 32,000 to 40,000.<sup>45</sup> Deteriorating security conditions, seasonal fighters and so-called “blue-collar insurgents” or “paycheck Taliban” (those who engage in insurgent activities for supplemental income) inflate the number of supplemental insurgents that fight alongside “full-time” fighters at any given point.

In terms of aggressive tactics, like the Afghan *mujahedeen* who fought against the Soviets between 1979 and 1989, the Taliban and other insurgent groups prefer asymmetrical attacks and guerilla warfare such as hit-and-run ambushes, assassinations, rocket attacks, land-mines and improvised-explosive (IED) attacks. The number of IEDs against coalition forces in Afghanistan has spiked considerably over the past several years, jumping from 100 per month in 2006 to over 800 a month during the summer of 2009, peaking in August 2009 with over 1,000 recorded IED incidents.<sup>46</sup> Forty-one U.S. and NATO soldiers were killed by IEDs in Afghanistan in 2006, 78 in 2007; 152 in 2008; 275 in 2009; 368 in 2010; 252 in 2011; 132 in 2012; and 41 in 2013 (as of August 2013).<sup>47</sup>

Suicide bombings, a new phenomenon in Afghanistan, appeared in low numbers following the Taliban’s defeat in 2001. Taliban leaders Mullah Dadullah and Jalaluddin Haqqani facilitated cadres of suicide bombers in the tribal areas of Pakistan during the incubation phase of the current insurgency (2002-03) but by 2006-07, suicide bombings became a common battlefield tactic among the Taliban, *Hezb-i-Islami*, and *Tora Bora Nizami Mahaz* (Tora Bora Military Front). Aside from suicide attacks, tactics imported from connections with radical militants in Chechnya and Iraq appeared in Afghanistan by 2005 and 2006, including videotaped beheadings, sniper attacks, and larger truck bombs.<sup>48</sup> Suicide bombers are now used in conjunction with armed assaults against fortified structures and compounds, usually coalition bases or Afghan government buildings.

According to the UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), opium production has dropped dramatically since 2010 in some provinces as a result of both prevention methods and improvement in local security. The UN, NATO-ISAF and Afghan officials differ on how relevant income derived from drug trafficking is for the Taliban. The U.S. and NATO suspect the Taliban earns between \$60 million and \$100 million a year from the drug industry, the UN estimates the number to be \$125 million, and Afghan observers have put the number as high as \$500 million a year.<sup>49</sup> Richard Hol-

brooke, the former U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, declared that the Taliban makes more money from donations from wealthy supporters in the Arab Gulf than they do from the drug trade.<sup>50</sup>

Nevertheless, the Taliban and other insurgents' participation in the narcotics trade is widespread on the battlefields of southern Afghanistan. Drug traffickers provide the Taliban motorcycles, cellular phones, SIM cards, weapons and explosives in exchange for protection of their processing workshops, refinement labs, opium markets and trafficking routes.<sup>51</sup> A growing phenomenon since 2008 is the advent of "narco-suicide terrorism"; drug traffickers are outsourcing the technical skills of the Taliban and other groups to conduct suicide attacks against counter-narcotics personnel and their headquarters.

Often billed as "the stable and secure" northern areas, Afghanistan's northern provinces have been the target of a burgeoning Taliban insurgency since 2004. The northern province of Kunduz has borne much of the brunt of insurgent activity, including a protracted suicide and roadside bomb campaign initiated by Taliban and foreign fighters on Afghan and international forces, government facilities, and military bases. On October 8, 2010, the longstanding provincial governor of Kunduz was killed along with 19 others in a blast as throngs of worshippers gathered at a mosque in neighboring Takhar province.<sup>52</sup> Abdul Wahid Omerkhail, the long-time governor of Kunduz's Chardara district, died after a suicide bomber detonated himself at the governor's office on February 10, 2011.<sup>53</sup> Two weeks later, another suicide bombing in the Imam Sahib district killed 31 civilians as residents lined up at the local government census office. Residents and security officials claimed the Mohammed Ayoub Haqyar, the district governor, was the intended target of the blast.<sup>54</sup>

In May 2011, a Taliban suicide attack killed Afghan Gen. Daud Daud, commander of Afghanistan's Northern Corp, in Takhar province. On September 20, 2011, a Taliban emissary hiding a bomb in his turban assassinated the Head of the Afghan High Peace Council and former Afghan president, Burhanuddin Rabbani, in his home in Kabul making it one of the highest-profile assassinations since the war began. The same month, Taliban fighters armed with rocket-propelled grenades and suicide vests staged a spectacular attack in daylight on the U.S. Embassy and Afghan government buildings in Kabul, killing at least 10 Afghan soldiers and wounding 15 others.

Similarly, On December 6, 2012, a Taliban suicide bomber posing as a peace envoy detonated his explosives during a meeting with Asadullah Khalid, the head of Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security, as he welcomed him



into his guesthouse in Kabul. Although Khalid survived the attack, the Taliban took credit for the plot.

In May 2013, the Pakistani Taliban staged a coordinated and complex attack on one of Pakistan's naval airbase in the city of Karachi, triggering an hours-long battle in which at least 10 Pakistani soldiers were killed and at least two naval aircraft destroyed. In June 2013, three Taliban suicide bombers launched a sophisticated attack on Afghanistan's presidential palace and Ariana Hotel, where the CIA local office is allegedly stationed, sparking hours of fighting between Afghan and Taliban fighters. Similarly, in July 2013, the Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for an attack on a regional office of Pakistan intelligence agency, the ISI, which killed nine people and highlighted their ability to strike important military targets.

## ENDNOTES

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