

American Foreign Policy Council



TALIBAN

QUICK FACTS

Geographical Areas of Operation: South Asia

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

Leadership: Muhammed Omar, Abdul Ghani Baradar, Obaidullah Akhund

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 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 1992-93.¹ 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 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 Berader, 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.

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 *andiwāl* (war comrades) network of Islamic conservatives, made up of *madrassa*-educated 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.² Although the Taliban was predominantly Pashtun, due to its origin in the predominantly Pashtun Kandahar region, tribal lineage overall had very little to do with its formation; its members have come from both Duranni and Ghilzai tribes, which have been known to clash. Additionally, the movement initially tried to appeal to all of Afghanistan's ethnicities, and at least one Tajik sat on its *majlis-shura* (leadership council).³ Uzbeks and northern Badakhshi Afghans were reportedly in charge of local Taliban missions in Paktia province.⁴

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 Afghanistan's rural and poor environs.⁵ 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 gobble up territory across the country. Although the Taliban movement represented a socio-religious military organization, the Taliban consisted of several additional overlapping components and sponsors.

Within six months of Mullah Omar's liberation of much of Kandahar province, 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. As Mullah Omar and his vigilante militia began to spread their influence throughout Afghanistan, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the Pakistani military, and the Pashtun "trucking mafia" located in Quetta offered the Taliban logistical and financial aid to help secure the roadways following the success of the rescued Pakistani convoy at Kandahar's airfield. The Taliban also began to incorporate some former communist regime elements, particularly those loyal to former 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.⁶ 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 the *madrassas*.⁷

The original Taliban has accurately been described as a “caravan to which different people attached themselves for various reasons.”⁸ This description remains largely accurate today. During an interview in 2006, Afghanistan’s former Interior Minister, Ali A. 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.”⁹ The Taliban’s former ambassador to Pakistan, Mullah Salaam Zaeef, now under house arrest in Kabul, stated the group does not refer to its forces as Taliban, but as *mujahedeen*, because only one in ten fighters is a true Taliban, while the rest are “ordinary Afghans.”¹⁰

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 Mullah Omar sought refuge following his ouster from Afghanistan. Initially, the movement consisted of a ten man *Rabhari Shura* (Leadership Council) consisting of eight old guard Taliban military commanders from southern Afghanistan and one from Paktika and another from Paktia.¹¹ In March 2003, Mullah Omar expanded the *Rabhari 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.”¹²

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 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 2008.¹³ While some view the manifesto is 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 Taliban organization is centered on its Supreme Leadership head, Mullah Mohammad Omar, and his military and political deputy Mullah Abdul Ghani, best known under his *nom de guerre* Mullah Berader Akhund, and a series of military councils, which in turn help facilitate the functioning of the Taliban’s four regional zones. Mullah Berader, the Taliban’s most competent and respected military commander, was captured in a covert ISI-CIA sting operation in Karachi Pakistan sometime in early February 2010.¹⁴ The Taliban’s operational command over daily events is nowled 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 2008.¹⁵ Maluvi 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. The Peshawar Shura, led by Maluvi Abdul Kabir, is thought to influence operations in Nangarhar, Laghman, Kunar, Nuristan, Logar, Kabul, Wardak, 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 Pakistani Baluchistan, 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 Jhavangi, Jaish-e Muhammad, Sipah-e Sahaba Pakistan and possibly some of the banned Kashmiri groups like Harakat ul-Mujahedin.¹⁶ 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 agencies of Pakistan share ancestral lineages with many of Afghanistan's Pashtun tribesman

and both have long resisted colonial attempts of 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 agency's 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-khot 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 Harkat-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.¹⁷ 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 kinship, launching spectacular raids and ambushes against the superior Pakistani military forces.¹⁸

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.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ 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 pro-

tect 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, 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.²¹ Subsequently, the assassination of presidential candidate 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.²² 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 Maulavi 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. unmanned aerial vehicles striking targets 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 home-

town of Baitullah Mehsud, as well as Ladha, Kotkai, Kaniguram, and Sararogha were primary targets of the operation.²³ Three weeks into the operation, Pakistani military officials claimed to have killed 300 militants while losing 45 soldiers.²⁴ Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani 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.²⁵ Nearly 35,000 Pakistani troops remained in South Waziristan during the late winter of 2010 to help guard roads, provide security for development projects and towns, and prepare for the return of about 41,000 displaced families, according to media reports.²⁶

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 new second-in-command Waliur Rehman, and other top positions to Maulana Faqir Mohammad and Qari Hussein Mehsud, the TTP's top suicide-bomber facilitator. Hakeemullah was reportedly killed in or as a result of a drone strike in South Waziristan Agency in January 2010.²⁷ The TTP released a series of audio messages from Hakeemullah and before March, Hakeemullah appeared in a 43-minute videotaped interview submitted to a global media outlet proving he survived the attack.²⁸

In the wake of the operation, much of the TTP leadership and foot soldiers dispersed throughout the region, mostly into Orakzai Agency, North Waziristan, and to a lesser degree, Kurram Agency. To date, no major Pakistani military operation has occurred in North Waziristan, a focal point the United States continues to push with Pakistani officials. According to Pakistani Foreign Office spokesman Abdul Basit, "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."²⁹

The Haqqani Network: Once a key recipient of U.S. funding and arms during the Soviet-Afghan war of the 1980s, Jalaluddin Haqqani has maintained his status as a prominent *mujahideen* commander who holds sway in several southeastern provinces in Afghanistan. His preservation of power and prestige has largely surpassed that of the Taliban's elusive supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar, especially among Haqqani's Karlanri Pashtuns of 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."³⁰

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.³¹ 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 (Mezi sub-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 intelli-

gence 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 India's embassy in Kabul on July 7, 2008.³²

Jalaluddin Haqqani, never part of the original Kandahari Taliban, was franchised into the Taliban in 1996 as the religious militia neared his stronghold of Paktia. Since then, Jalaluddin Haqqani (and later Siraj Haqqani) has pledged *bayat* (allegiance) to Mullah Mohammad Omar, becoming the Minister of Tribal and Border Affairs, the Governor of Paktia and eventually the Taliban's overall military commander. 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 began to circulate rumors of Jalaluddin's death in the summer of 2007. 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 shadow governors, with Siraj serving as "regional governor" for the tri-province area known locally as Loya Paktia. U.S. Special Operations against the Taliban and the Haqqani Network increased substantially in 2010, resulting in 900 low and mid-level commanders being arrested or killed, according to U.S. military officials.³³ Additionally, Pakistani officials reportedly arrested Naisruddin Haqqani, a top financier and son of Jalaluddin Haqqani, in late December 2010 as he traveled from Peshawar to Miram Shah, North Waziristan.³⁴ Mullah Muhammad Jan, a top Haqqani Network military commander, and two associates were also reported to be traveling with Naisruddin during the time of his arrest. The Haqqanis have been making inroads toward Kabul since 2007. Ghazni, Logar, Wardak, Nangarhar and Kabul are now areas with known

Haqqani Network presence, while reports in early 2009 suggest Haqqani associates and bomb experts may be operating in southern Kandahar Province, a traditional Quetta-Taliban stronghold.³⁵

A series of complex assaults against Afghan government and economic institutions in Kabul, Jalalabad, and Khost City have been attributed to the Haqqani Network and its “Kabul Strike Group,” a shadowy guerrilla front that plans and conducts sophisticated attacks usually including a commando style raid with suicide-bombers against urban targets in Kabul City. The brazen day-light attack which involved gunmen and suicide bombers dressed as border police against Jalalabad’s main bank on February 19, 2011 killed least 42 people and wounded more than 70 is one of the most deadly attacks attributed to the Haqqani Network this year.³⁶

Past attacks attributed to the Haqqani Network include the multi-pronged assault on two Afghan ministries and a prison headquarters in the Kabul that left 19 people dead and more than 50 wounded, the 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 Bahktar guest house and stormed the facility, eventually detonating several suicide vests and killing at least six foreign UN personnel and six others. The deadly suicide bombing of an American 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.

Tora Bora Nizami Mahaz (Tora Bora Military Front) – Following the death of Younis Khalis, a legendary *mujahedeen* commander and the leader of his own Hizb-e-Islami faction, Khalis’ son Anwur-ul

Haq Mujahid created his own resistance front called the *Tora Bora Nizami Mahaz*. After announcing the group's formation in early 2007, Mujahid claimed responsibility for a rash of attacks against Afghan and coalition forces in the eastern province of Nangarhar, an area more prone to narco-cartels and smuggling mafias than Taliban groups. The Tora Bora Front has been blamed for the deadly car-bombing of a U.S. Marine convoy in the Shinwar district—an attack that prompted a heavy-handed response from the fleeing U.S. convoy which left over three dozen civilians injured and 12 killed.³⁷ The group publishes its own propaganda magazine, *Tora Bora*, and maintains its own website, Al Emarah, separate from the Taliban's main propaganda components. In October 2007, the Taliban announced a reshuffling of its “eastern zone” and appointed Maulavi Abdul Kabir as the new *amir de zon* (zonal chief), a decision allegedly fully supported by Mujahid.³⁸ Several large scale attacks and suicide bombings in Nangarhar have been attributed to the Tora Bora group. In June 2009, Pakistani media reports indicated Mujahid was arrested during a sting operation in Peshawar, a claim denied by Mujahid's network and his relatives.³⁹ Speculation regarding his detention subsided after credible reports indicated Mujahid delivered a sermon at the funeral of Awal Gul, a senior Taliban leader who died while in detention at Guantanamo Bay, and whose body was subsequently returned to Nangarhar province for burial in February 2011.⁴⁰ The Tora Bora Front continues to function in some capacity, intermittently maintaining and updating its website, producing its quarterly Tora Bora magazine, and launching occasional attacks in Nangarhar province. The group's support base remains strongest in Khalis' native district of Khogyani and the volatile areas of Pachir Agam and Shinwar.

Taliban Jamiat Jaish-e Moslemim (Muslim Army of the Taliban Society): Saber Momen, a senior Taliban commander operating in southern Afghanistan, announced the creation of Taliban Jamiat Jaish-e Moslemim (Muslim Army of the Taliban Society) in August 2004. Internal rifts and criticism over weak leadership prompted Mullah Sayeed Muhammad Akbar Agha to split from the Quetta Shura and create the new faction. The Taliban quickly dismissed the offshoot organization, stressing that all “Taliban commanders are

united under the leadership of Mullah Omar.⁴¹

Jaish-e Moslemim is credited with the high-profile abduction of three foreign UN election officials from Kabul in October 2004. Pakistani authorities later arrested Akbar Agha and 17 of his associates in December 2004, effectively leading to the demise of the group in June 2005 when the remaining 750 Jaish operatives folded back into the Taliban movement.⁴²

Jaish al-Mahdi (the Army of the Mahdi): During the summer of 2007, a militant Afghan and Arab organization Jaish al-Mahdi (Army of the Mahdi) announced its creation. Led by Abu Haris, a Syrian commander who fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan during the 1980s, Jaish al-Mahdi claimed to have 250 fighters and maintained close links with both al-Qaeda and the Taliban.⁴³ The group sought refuge in Pakistan's North Waziristan tribal area and enjoyed a strategic relationship with the Haqqani Network also based in North Waziristan. On September 8, 2008, a U.S. airstrike killed Abu Haris, three other al-Qaeda fighters and a number of Jalaluddin Haqqani's relatives near the town of Miram Shah.⁴⁴ It is unclear how much operational capability Jaish al-Mahdi retains, but reports in 2007 suggested a large number of foreign fighters linked to al-Qaeda and the Taliban were fighting in Helmand province, scores of whom were reportedly killed in clashes with coalition forces. In 2008, a coalition operation against the Taliban in Helmand's Garmsir district killed 150 fighters in one week's time, many of them foreigners. The total number of fighters in the district at the time was estimated to be 500, again, most of them foreigners.⁴⁵

*Khaddam al-Furqan (Servants of the Koran)*⁴⁶ : Shortly after the collapse of the Taliban government in December 2001, a cadre of Taliban "moderates" regrouped in Pakistan and announced the creation of Khaddam al-Furqan (Servants of the Koran). The Taliban's former minister of foreign affairs, Wakil Ahmad Mutawakkil, the former education minister, Mawlawi Arsala Rahmani, the Taliban's UN envoy, Abdul Hakim Mujahed, and the former deputy minister for information and culture, Abdul Rahman Hotak, make up the

group's core. Mohamad Amim Mojadeedi, an Islamic cleric and the son of Maulavi Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi, the former leader of the highly influential Harakat-e Enqalab party that resisted the Soviet occupation in the 1980s, serves as the head of Khaddam al-Furqan.⁴⁷ The group distanced itself from the policies of Omar's Taliban regime and made overtures to Hamid Karzai's feeble Pash-tun coalition, who allowed the group to participate in the Emergency *Loya Jirga* held in June 2002.

In 2004, only Mohammad Amin Mojadeedi traveled to Kabul in an attempt to register the group to run in the Parliamentary elections, an indication that *Khaddam* suffered from a fractured structure and shaky constituency. By 2005, *Khaddam al-Furqan* continued to exist, albeit shrouded in mystery, but publicly identified itself when four high-ranking former Taliban officials entered into negotiations with the government. In 2008, *Khaddam al-Furqan* continued to promote reconciliation between the Afghan government and the Taliban, offering up a seven-point strategy to help facilitate a political resolution to the current conflict.⁴⁸

Hezb-i-Islam (Party of Islam): A young Islamist named Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a Kharoti Pashtun from the northern Afghan province of Kunduz, formed the Hezb-i-Islami 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 ISI and financial assistance from American 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.⁴⁹

His reign of terror also included the shelling of Kabul during the 1992-1994 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. Post-2001, Hekmatyar clandestinely left his sanctuary in Mashhad, Iran, and has remained a fugitive ever since, floating between 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.⁵⁰ 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 2010.⁵¹ 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.

GLOBAL REACH

The Afghan Taliban movement has restricted its efforts to attacks within the borders of Afghanistan, although violent clashes on 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.⁵² 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. Mullah Omar, the Supreme Commander of the Taliban, repeated

this rhetoric in one of his two annual Eid statements to the Afghan people, which appeared in mid-November 2010.⁵³ The public outreach came at a time of increasing prospects for negotiations and a possible political accommodation between the Afghan government and Taliban fronts which NATO, the U.S., the UN and Pakistan have all endorsed in various capacities.

The TTP, especially following the Baitullah Mehsud's reign of terror between 2007 and 2009, have shown interest in not only attacking 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.⁵⁴ Others in the TTP are believed to be prepared to act on it; on January 19, 2009, Spanish authorities seized 14 suspected associates of Mehsud 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.⁵⁵ Similarly, Mehsud 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.⁵⁶ However, investigators quickly identified the gunman as a deranged Vietnamese immigrant with no ties to international terrorist groups or radical Islamist movements.

Mehsud's close association with Arab al-Qaeda leaders and Uzbek militants in South Waziristan partially explains 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 Hakeemullah Mehsud, the radical TTP commander of the Orakzai Agency, became the new *amir* for the TTP. Hakeemullah 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 Afghanistan's Khost province.⁵⁷ The deadly attack killed eight CIA officers and left six others severely injured on December 28, 2009.

RECENT ACTIVITY

Since the Taliban movement'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 distributing 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 of 2010, the Taliban also 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. Out of the 85 rules in the 2010 *layeha*, 47 were repeated from the 2009 version, 14 were modified/altered, and 24 were new (18 of which are new additions, six additional articles replace the omissions from the 2009 *layeha*).⁵⁸ 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 2006.⁵⁹ Outside observers estimate the size of the Taliban to be around 20,000 members, although some reach higher estimates of 32,000 to 40,000.⁶⁰ Deteriorating security conditions, seasonal fighters and so-called "blue-collar insurgents" (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 *mujahedeen* who fought against the Soviets between 1979 and 1989, the Taliban and other insurgent groups prefer asymmetrical attacks and guerilla warfare like hit-and-run ambushes, assassinations, rocket attacks and landmine 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.⁶¹ Similarly, 41 U.S. and NATO soldiers were killed by IEDs in Afghanistan in 2006, 172 troops died from an astounding 3,276 IEDs in 2008, and 250 U.S. and NATO soldiers were killed by IEDs in Afghanistan by mid-December 2009.⁶² In 2010, 372 U.S. and coalition forces died in combat from IED blasts in Afghanistan, making it the deadliest year for IED fatalities since the conflict began.⁶³

Suicide bombings, a new phenomenon in Afghanistan, appeared in low numbers following the Taliban's defeat in 2001. Taliban leaders Mullah Dadullah "Lang" and Jalaluddin Haqqani facilitated cadres of suicide bombers in the tribal areas of Pakistan during the incubation phase of the current insurgency (2002-03) and by 2006-07, suicide bombings became a common battlefield tactic among three leading insurgent groups in Afghanistan; 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.⁶⁴ Suicide bombers are now used in conjunction with armed assaults against fortified structures and compounds, usually coalition bases or Afghan government buildings. Such complex attacks have occurred in Kandahar, Kunduz, Baghlan, Farah, Nangarhar, Kunar, Nuristan, Helmand, Nimroz, Kabul, Khost, Paktia and Pakitka since 2008.

In 2008 and 2009, 98 percent of Afghanistan's opium was produced in seven provinces in southwestern Afghanistan, all of which are areas under contested control or under the influence of the Tal-

iban.⁶⁵ UN, U.S., NATO 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.⁶⁶ Richard Holbrooke, 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.⁶⁷

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.⁶⁸ 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. In 2008, the UN tallied 78 fatalities caused by mine explosions, gun attacks, and suicide bombings against eradication teams and counter-narcotics personnel; an increase of about 75 percent over 2007 tallies.⁶⁹ The trend of narco-criminals in conjunction with the Taliban supporting or facilitating attacks against eradication personnel and government targets has continued in 2009; prior to the 2009 opium harvesting, four suicide attacks targeting counternarcotics personnel and their headquarters in Helmand and Nimroz provinces left 16 people dead and 55 wounded, according to local media reports.⁷⁰ Although the coalition no longer actively conducts poppy eradication campaigns, Afghanistan's Government Led Eradication (GLE) initiative, a coalition-financed anti-narcotics strategy that tasks provincial counter-drug forces with destroying poppy crops, has had mixed results and remains vulnerable to insurgent and anti-government attacks. During the 2010 GLE campaign, insurgents and angry farmers attacked GLE forces in Helmand province at least eight times during eradication operations, and there have also been attacks in Nangarhar.⁷¹ A total of 24

police and three farmers were killed in these attacks, with 21 police, six farmers and five tractor drivers were injured.

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 Taliban have implemented a two-pronged approach that includes establishing a stronghold in the northwest province of Badghis to sever the supply routes through the Herat-Badghis Sabzak Pass, the sole entry into northwestern Afghanistan, while creating a northeastern jump-off point in northern Baghlan and Kunduz Provinces. Afghan authorities are increasingly concerned about what they view as the Taliban’s expansion into non-traditional conflict zones such as Sar-i-Pul, Samangan and Balkh provinces, although the Governor of Balkh attributes more of the instability to Hezb-i-Islami.⁷²

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 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.⁷³ 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, 2011.⁷⁴ 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.⁷⁵

The Taliban’s northern offensive, orchestrated since 2007 under the leadership of the Quetta Shura’s Mullah Shah Mansoor Dadullah, Mullah Berader and, to an extent, Mullah Mohammad Omar, has recently proved successful in targeting NATO’s unity and its mission in Afghanistan. Since major hostilities peaked in Kunduz during the summer of 2009, ramped up efforts by NATO, Afghan forces, and Pakistan’s security services to restore stability in Kunduz resulted in several Taliban leaders in Kunduz being killed and cap-

tured as well as the high-profile arrest of Mullah Berader, the mastermind behind the Taliban's nationwide military strategy.⁷⁶

Operations against the Taliban in Kunduz continued in 2010, and at least three formerly Taliban controlled areas, the Imam Sahib, Dasht-i-Archi and Chaharra Darra districts, are once again under nominal government authority after Operation Khorshid cleared many insurgents from the area.⁷⁷

The Taliban has also ramped up its efforts against "soft-targets" in urban centers such as Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad, and Kunduz City in an attempt to shatter the secure and stable image of Afghanistan's population centers. This trend is an alarming parallel to previous campaigns unleashed by the Taliban, the Haqqani Network and Hezb-i-Islami that steadily saw an increase in urban guerilla warfare.

In 2009, the Taliban launched major suicide attacks against NATO convoys in Kabul, conducted a deadly suicide-bomber assault against UN guesthouse complexes in the Shar-e-Naw neighborhood and detonated a massive truck bomb targeting senior Afghan officials and Western personnel in the fortified Wazir Akhbar Khan neighborhood. These high-profile attacks and others like it throughout the country highlight the perception that the Taliban can "strike anywhere at any time." Similar attacks in 2008 and early 2009 rocked Kabul as well, including the deadly suicide-bombing assault on the Justice and Education Ministries as well as on an office of the Prisons Department.⁷⁸

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