

# THE IRRECONCILABLES: THE HAQQANI NETWORK

As the Karzai administration continues to press ahead with preliminary outreach to insurgents, Pakistan has quietly stepped in to offer their assistance. The Pakistanis have reportedly offered to help reach out to the murderous Haqqani organization in the hopes of bringing the movement's leader, Siraj Haqqani, to the negotiating table; however, any proposed deal with the Haqqanis is directly at odds with President Obama's reaffirmed commitment to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Haqqanis rely on Al Qaeda for mass appeal, funding, resources and training, and in return provide Al Qaeda with shelter, protection and a means to strike foreign forces in Afghanistan and beyond. Any negotiated settlement with the Haqqanis threatens to undermine the *raison d'être* for U.S. involvement in Afghanistan over the past decade.

## THE HAQQANIS AND AL QAEDA: AN ENDURING PARTNERSHIP

The Haqqanis' relationship with Al Qaeda dates back to the mid-1980's and according to a statement from Siraj Haqqani in April 2010, his network's cooperation with Al Qaeda is "at its highest limits." Siraj's father and previous leader of the network, Jalaluddin Haqqani, first cemented ties with Osama bin Laden in 1986 when he was tapped by Pakistan's intelligence agency, the ISI, to build a cave complex in Haqqani's territory along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border for training Arab volunteers to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup>

When Al Qaeda was formed in 1988, the elder Haqqani supervised these camps at the behest of the ISI. Haqqani came to the aid of bin Laden once again following the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001. After staging his escape from the mountains of Tora Bora, bin Laden traveled from Parachinar, Pakistan to North Waziristan under the protection of the Haqqanis. Although Al Qaeda's senior leadership has gone underground, partly in fear of U.S. drone strikes, Siraj insists that they still enjoy extremely close ties. He is believed to serve on Al Qaeda's leadership council, or *Shura Majlis*, in Pakistan.<sup>2</sup>

The Haqqani network, with the help of Al Qaeda and others, is arguably the most capable and deadly insurgent group operating in Afghanistan today. Foreign fighters, such as Lashkar-e Taiba, the Islamic Jihad Union (which includes Kurdish, Uzbek, Azerbaijani, Turkish and German foreign terrorists), as well as Al Qaeda and Al Qaeda-affiliated Arabs, Chechens and others cohabitate, train, and liaise with Haqqani network personnel in and around the town of Miram Shah, the Haqqanis' stronghold in Pakistan's North Waziristan Agency. The Haqqani network in Afghanistan provides a platform for Al Qaeda and others with shared goals to resource and execute some of the most spectacular suicide attacks on Afghan soil. The Haqqani network, with the help of Al Qaeda and others, has been responsible for and associated with the majority of suicide attacks in the Afghan capital of Kabul, including the bombings of the Indian Embassy, the Serena hotel, and, most recently, the attacks on ISAF's Bagram

Airbase, and the CIA's compound in Khost.

Siraj Haqqani is much more dangerous than his father ever was. It is said that Siraj sees himself in “grandiose religious terms,” a product of his close contact with radicalized Arabs during his youth. Interactions with foreign Islamic extremists in Miram Shah, North Waziristan, Saudi Arabia, and Dubai, where his Arab mother reportedly lives has molded the young leader into the ruthless commander he is today. Unlike his father, Siraj is despised by many in their southeastern Afghanistan stronghold, since he fails to provide security or resources to the much maligned population. The majority of the support that he and his commanders enjoy is either coerced or bought, and he relies on his vast criminal enterprises such as smuggling, extortion, and donations from foreigners sympathetic to jihad. The lack of popular support from the majority of the population in southeastern Afghanistan means that a negotiated settlement with the Haqqani network may actually inflame tensions in the region.

## KARZAI, PAKISTAN, AND THE HAQQANIS

American and Afghan senior leaders understand that any progress against the Haqqanis, be it through negotiations or military action, must take account of Pakistani interests. Yet, the recent warming in relations between President Karzai and the Pakistani government must be viewed within the proper context, and there is reason to be concerned about the nature of these interests. Between May and June of this year General Ahmed Shuja Pasha, chief of Pakistan's ISI, and Pakistan's Army Chief of Staff General Ashfaq Kiyani met with President Karzai in Kabul to discuss a host of issues, including efforts to reach out to Siraj Haqqani.<sup>3</sup> Although this is an unprecedented effort by both nations to cooperate on an issue of regional significance, the motivations behind this outreach provide cause for concern.

It was rumored in early June that President Karzai was losing faith in the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan and was beginning to probe Pakistan on possible

ways to end the insurgency. Although Karzai has leveled charges against the Pakistani government for actively aiding the Afghan insurgents for much of the past ten years, he appears to have dropped the public blaming. The recent dismissal of Karzai's leading Pakistan critic and head of Afghanistan's intelligence agency, Amrullah Saleh, seems to support this theory.

Elements within the Pakistani establishment have maintained support for the Haqqanis to varying degrees since the late 1970s, first as an anti-Soviet resistance movement, later as a means to combat the anti-Pashtun Northern Alliance who seized power in Kabul, and today, as a proxy force capable of representing Pakistani interests in the country. Pakistan's current offer to help in negotiations with the Haqqanis is likely an attempt to lessen U.S. pressure for Pakistani military action in the Haqqanis' command and control hub in North Waziristan than it is a sincere desire to rein in the Haqqanis. Both Karzai and elements within Pakistan maintain direct contact with Haqqani leadership and have for years—meanwhile, the security situation on both sides of the border has steadily deteriorated. When Jalaluddin first reconstituted the Haqqani network after the U.S. invasion in 2001, there were efforts by his brother Ibrahim to reach out to CIA and Afghan officials in Kabul about the possibility of joining the government.<sup>4</sup> These efforts failed, however, when Ibrahim was arrested by U.S. forces operating independently of the CIA. Since then, Karzai has reached out to the Haqqanis on two separate occasions in 2007 and 2009 without success.<sup>5</sup> Karzai's outreach was rejected by Siraj, who had assumed command of the network from his father in 2005.<sup>6</sup>

The Haqqani network maintains considerable military strength and territorial control in the Southeast. It also enjoys relative sanctuary in North Waziristan, and the network is capable of executing spectacular suicide attacks in Kabul at will. Despite statements from the Pakistanis to the contrary, Siraj would have no logical reason to engage in genuine negotiations as long as the status quo persists and a draw-down date of U.S. forces in July 2011 looms in the not-so-distant future. CIA

Director Leon Panetta recently stated that U.S. officials had not seen “any firm intelligence” to suggest that the Haqqani network was serious about negotiations.<sup>7</sup>

The false belief that Siraj Haqqani and his network of local and foreign hard-line jihadists are reconcilable runs counter to nearly thirty years of evidence to the contrary. Siraj’s conception of himself as a revered and authentic jihadist leader and the credibility his relationship with Al Qaeda bestows on the Haqqani network precludes the possibility that he might be swayed away from supporting bin Laden. The Haqqanis and Al Qaeda maintain a symbiotic relationship to the extent that each side is equally unlikely to break the bond that has been forged over the past several decades. Striking a deal with the Haqqanis will not only relieve pressure on the Pakistanis to dismantle the terror hub in North Waziristan, but will embolden Al Qaeda and like-minded terrorist organizations, providing them with a veil of legitimacy under the continued protection of the Haqqanis.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars*, Penguin Books, New York, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Bill Roggio, “The Afghan Taliban’s top leaders,” *Long War Journal*, February 23, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> *The Washington Post* reported on June 28, 2010 that President Karzai, General Ashfaq Paervez Kayani and Lieutenant General Ahmed Shuja Pasha met with Sirajuddin Haqqani in-person in mid-June. All sides have denied that any such meeting took place.

<sup>4</sup> Jay Solomon, “Failed courtship of warlord trips up U.S. in Afghanistan,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 8, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Baqir Sajjad Syed, “Pakistan trying to broker Afghan deal,” *DAWN*, June 16, 2010

<sup>6</sup> “Unravelling Haqqani’s Net,” *Jane’s Terrorism and Security Monitor*, June 30, 2009; Claudio Franco, “A Taliban Resurgence: the Destabilization of Kabul,” *The NEFA Foundation*, November 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Finn and Karen DeYoung, “Panetta says Afghan insurgents show no real interest in reconciliation talks,” *Washington Post*, June 28, 2010.