

The Tangled Web of Taliban and Associated Movements

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Author Biography

Greg Smith is a Senior Master Sergeant in the United States Air Force and a graduate of Henley-Putnam University where he completed his Bachelor's Degree in Terrorism and Counterterrorism Studies. He has participated in combat operations over the former Yugoslavia and is a veteran of operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. He currently serves as the lead Air Force Instructor at the Joint Special Operations Forces Senior Enlisted Academy, Joint Special Operations University, MacDill AFB, Florida. He is an Evaluator Gunner in the AC-130U "Spooky" and AC-130H "Spectre" gunships and has flown more than 3,400 hours including 291 combat missions and 1,375 combat hours.

Abstract

Following the devastating terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, worldwide attention became focused on the Taliban and al-Qaida forces in Afghanistan. Prior to the attacks, many people had never heard of the Taliban or their shar'ia-law style of government. Since 2001, many splinter groups have formed in response to the continual United States presence in the region. Today, the term Taliban has been used to envelop several groups such as the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the Haqqani Network (HQN) and the Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM). These groups make up the majority of fighters along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Many of these groups have been historic rivals for control of the region, but have since joined a loose alliance in response to United States and Pakistani Government actions in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). This article examines the origins and operations of the Pakistani Taliban and associated groups. Particular attention will be given as to how these groups receive funding and support from each other through state sponsors such as Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency and non-state sponsors such as al-Qaida and Wahhabi idealists in Saudi Arabia, as well as arms supplies from Iran and potentially China.

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Introduction

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Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)

In early September 2004, the Pakistani Government sent eighty thousand army and Frontier Corps (FC) forces into the FATA of South Waziristan. Militant members of the Mehsud tribe, aligned in ideology to the Taliban and residents of the FATA, repelled the attacks by conducting ambushes of army convoys. These tribal fighters had long objected to any interference by the Pakistani forces in the region.¹ The battle resulted in a stalemate, with the army capitulating control of the FATA to the tribal fighters. Around the same time, a prominent militant leader, Baitullah Mehsud, launched attacks on tribal leaders who favored negotiations with the Pakistani Government. Mehsud labeled his group the TTP. To ensure success, the TTP received ideological support from al-Qaida senior leadership, logistical support from the Afghanistan Taliban, intelligence support from

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the ISI, and financial support from the *madrassas* and wealthy benefactors in the Middle East.

The United States, recognizing the growing threat of the TTP, conducted a series of strikes from MQ-1B Predator aircraft in South Waziristan. In response to the Predator airstrikes and Pakistan's continued incursions into South Waziristan, Mehsud's TTP supported a spectacular suicide attack on the JW Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, Pakistan.² This attack was sanctioned and applauded by al-Qaida and brought the TTP further under the Taliban umbrella.³ By all indications, al-Qaida continues to provide TTP with ideological support through its media outlets the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF) and the Foundation for Islamic Media Publication (*As-Sahab*) by praising TTP leaders and encouraging further attacks on the Pakistani Government.⁴

South Waziristan's western border leads directly into Afghanistan's Paktika province. Paktika has been a stronghold of the Afghanistan Taliban and has often been the site of attacks on coalition forces. The Taliban view Paktika as a strategic center of gravity as it leads to Kabul and the Tora Bora mountains. The TTP allow Afghan Taliban forces to use bases in South Waziristan to launch these attacks and share logistics with the parent movement.⁵ This cooperation between groups allows both to flourish in terms of supply and maneuver.

Mehsud and the TTP appeared to operate with impunity in the South Waziristan agency. This freedom of maneuver came in the face of continued Pakistani military incursions into the region. Reports have indicated that the ISI provided support to Mehsud in the form of advance warning of impending military actions in Waziristan.⁶ Mehsud was finally killed by a United States Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) in August 2009. The power vacuum has created some instability in the TTP, but the core faction is largely intact and under the leadership of Hakimullah Mehsud, a top commander in Orakzai province and cousin to the slain Baitullah.

Funding

The TTP receives substantial funding from three primary areas. First, the local *madrassas* have provided Mehsud with funding for his insurgency. *Madrassas* receive funding from prominent Muslims in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, which is then often funneled through the madrasa system into the hands of the TTP. Second, the TTP is indirectly funded from wealthy benefactors who share a common ideology of shar'ia law and subscribe to the Wahhabi sect of Islam. This radical view of Islam originated in Saudi Arabia and has spread throughout Pakistan in response to the

continued presence of U.S. forces in the region. Finally, The TTP participates in opium smuggling and heroin production in South Waziristan. Funding from this smuggling accounts for the vast majority of TTP financing.⁷

The Haqqani Network (HQN)

Jallaluddin Haqqani is the tribal leader in North Waziristan and has been associated with the Taliban for almost fourteen years. Haqqani serves as Amir for the HQN. The HQN conducts attacks inside Afghanistan's Paktika province from his Waziristan base. In 2008, this group was responsible for the majority of suicide attacks in Kabul, Afghanistan.⁸ Like the TTP, Haqqani and his network receive support from al-Qaida, other Taliban-associated movements, and passive support from the Pakistani Government and the ISI.

The HQN cooperates with Mehsud's TTP in terms of logistical support and tribal influence. While both groups originate from the same Zadran tribe, sub-tribe conflicts and competition for power kept the movements separated until the United States began operations in the region in late 2001. Predator strikes in the North Waziristan city of Miram Shah attempted to kill Haqqani but failed.⁹ These actions emboldened Haqqani and served to drive his group further under the influence of the overall Taliban movement. In addition, both HQN and TTP share access to opium smuggling routes allowing the drugs to move in and out of Afghanistan with relative ease. These actions are also a source of considerable funding for the group and allow future operations.

Haqqani has an established personal relationship with Usama bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri and was once the commander of all Taliban forces in Afghanistan when they battled the Northern Alliance in the late 1990s. Haqqani receives significant ideological and media support from al-Qaida's media network. Videos of HQN suicide bombers are broadcast on the GIMF websites to inspire other radical elements to action. Many of al-Qaida's messages include HQN as a member of their organization. While this is not entirely true, Haqqani capitalizes on this relationship in order to raise funds from benefactors sympathetic to al-Qaida's cause. The Waziristan Accord between the Pakistani Government and tribal elders in Waziristan, brokered by Haqqani, has allowed the HQN to grow in strength and influence.

Following the peace deal in Waziristan, Pakistan itself became an unwilling state sponsor of terror by allowing the group to operate unrestricted in

exchange for no attacks in Pakistan. Pakistan lacks the resources in the FATA to mitigate the HQN influence and is in fact trapped by the previous policies of self-government and a minimal footprint. All of these factors favor the HQN and allow them to wield enormous influence amongst the tribes in Waziristan.

During the 1980s, Haqqani was a favorite of the CIA and ISI in terms of funneling arms and mujahideen to fight the Soviets. As the Cold War ended, the CIA lost interest in Haqqani and quickly moved to other projects in Africa and the Middle East. The twelve-year absence of CIA presence was supplemented by Pakistan's ISI. Haqqani and the ISI shared significant intelligence as the Taliban marched across Afghanistan. This relationship, although strained by the events of September 11, has not completely dissolved. The ISI still provides the HQN with intelligence assistance in hopes of preserving the relationship post-U.S. withdrawal from the region. Many hard-line Islamists within the ISI continue to use the HQN and other associated movements as a proxy force for its greater ambitions in the region. Haqqani is happy to oblige this relationship but remains independent in actions against the United States forces in Afghanistan.

Finally, Haqqani receives considerable funding from wealthy Saudis and Gulf state Islamists. As one of the few movements that include a large number of foreign fighters, Haqqani has cultivated a strong relationship that ensures future funding. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states view Haqqani as an asset while downplaying any relationship to the United States. Radical Islamists see both the HQN and the TTP as models for future Islamic armies.

Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM)

The militant group capturing most of the headlines in Pakistan today is *Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi* (TNSM). Founded in 1992 by Maulana Sufi Mohammad in response to the United States' presence in Pakistan, the TNSM has attempted to implement shar'ia law in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Provinces (NWFP).¹⁰ The TNSM rose to prominence in 2001 when Sufi Mohammad rallied thousands of Pakistani tribesmen to fight the Northern Alliance. This campaign was closely monitored and supported by Pakistan's ISI.

As the United States war in Afghanistan began, the Pakistani Government closed the border but turned a blind eye to any militants wanting to fight for the Taliban.¹¹ These militants returned to Pakistan and began a cam-

paign of militancy in the Pakistani agencies of Bajaur and Malakand. The Pakistanis responded by capturing Sufi Mohammad and trying him for subversion. With Sufi Mohammad in a Pakistan prison, control of the TNSM fell to his son-in-law, Maulana Fazlullah. Fazlullah wasted no time in aligning his fighters under the Taliban umbrella.

The TNSM has waged a bloody offensive in the NWFP with actions in the Swat District and has exerted considerable influence in the agencies of Dir, Malakand, and Bajaur. The TNSM receives support in several areas. First, internal financial support for the group comes from radical mosques and *madrassas*. Funds from these entities allow the group to continue its struggle against the Pakistani Government. Second, TNSM fighters have taken control of the emerald mines in Swat Valley. The group retains about a third of the profits earned from these mines. This is significant considering that these emerald mines have historically yielded approximately 10 percent of the world's uncut gems, worth about US\$15 million.¹² Finally, the TNSM profits from smuggling activity in the border agencies of Bajaur and Dir. Opium smuggled through these routes heads either through Central Asia and on to Europe or across Kashmir toward Asia. Just as the HQN and TTP benefit from Saudi and Gulf State support, so too does the TNSM. This financial support is normally routed through charitable organizations and then filtered to the group for use.

Conclusion: Commonalities between the Three Groups

Although the three militant groups discussed are located in different areas and are from different tribes, they share four common beliefs that have led to a unified front for the time being. First, the groups all share a radical interpretation of Islam. This view aligns with the Taliban's goal of a strict implementation of shar'ia law. Second, all three groups vehemently oppose the presence of the United States in Afghanistan. As the Taliban and al-Qaida continue to call for Muslims to oppose the occupation, the groups are able to set aside tribal and cultural differences to unite against an outside force. Third, the groups oppose the Pakistani Government in terms of democratic reforms and an attempt to impose any form of rule in the NWFP and FATA; the actions of the Pakistani army, at the urging of the United States, have actually made the situation worse for the government. Finally, all of the groups are profiting from the conflict in terms of finances and power. Hakimullah Mehsud, Haqqani, and Fazlullah have emerged as the leaders of their respective groups and

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have benefited from continued actions. They will continue to support each other and the Taliban as long as it continues to prove profitable in terms of ideology, power, and funds.

About the Author

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