The Haqqani terror network and the new Taliban government

Shaul Shay

(Senior research fellow at the International Institute for Counterterrorism (ICT) at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya and former deputy head of Israel's National Security Council)

The Taliban announced on September 7, 2021, an interim government for Afghanistan. In announcing the Cabinet, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid emphasized that the appointments were temporary, but he did not say how long they would serve.[1]

A policy statement accompanying the Cabinet announcement sought to allay fears of Afghanistan's neighbors and the rest of the world. "Our message to our neighbors, the region and the world is that Afghanistan's soil will not be used against the security of any other country," the statement said.[2]

The statement urged foreign diplomats, embassies, consulates and humanitarian organizations to return to Afghanistan. "Their presence is the need of our country," it said.[3]

Two senior members of the Haqqani network, a US-designated terror group aligned with the Taliban and al Qaeda, will also be in the interim government. Both have been sanctioned by the UN and the US.[4]

Sirajuddin Haqqani, the network's leader, will be the acting interior minister and Khalil Haqqani, Sirajuddin's uncle, was appointed as acting minister for refugees.

The U.S. considered the Haqqani network the most lethal and sophisticated terror group targeting US, Coalition, and Afghan forces and a serious threat to its counter-terrorism operations in Afghanistan.

The Haqqani network was considered a terrorist group because of its involvement in the Afghan insurgency, attacks on US military and civilian personnel and Western interests in Afghanistan, and because of its ties to the Taliban and Al Qaeda.[5] The US first designated the Haqqani network as a terrorist organization in 2012.[6]

The Haqqanis belong to the Jadran tribe, which is a native of eastern Afghanistan's Paktia region, but in the years of war against the US and NATO forces in Afghanistan (2001 – 2021) the Haqqanis have their main sanctuary in Pakistan's tribal territory in North Waziristan Agency in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan.[7]

An estimate in 2011 placed the number of fighters in the Haqqani network between 10,000 and 15,000.

The Haqqani network is a Taliban-affiliated group of militants that thanks to its financial and military strength and a reputation for ruthlessness the Haqqani network is considered semi-autonomous while remaining within the Taliban fold.[8]

The Haqqani network has been at the forefront of insurgent activity in Afghanistan, known for launching many high-profile spectacular attacks against Western and Indian targets in Afghanistan.

The Haqqanis have helped the Taliban in enhancing the latter's military effectiveness and operational impact and reach and the Haqqanis have strengthened the Taliban's campaigns over the years particularly in Kabul. [9]

The terror threat of the Haqqani network

The network has been accused or claimed responsibility for some of the deadliest attacks in Afghanistan. The Haqqanis have a reputation for frequently using suicide bombers - including drivers in cars and trucks packed with huge amounts of explosives - and have demonstrated the ability to carry out complex, high-casualty assaults on major targets including military installations and embassies.

Examples of Haqqani network terror attacks

The Haqqani network have been accused of assassinations including an attempt against then-president Karzai. In April 2008 - President Hamid Karzai survived an assassination attempt while attending a military parade close to his presidential palace, but three civilians were killed.

In January 2008 - several gunmen stormed a luxury hotel near the presidential palace, killing six people, including a Norwegian journalist.

In February 2009 - a number of terrorists, involving suicide bombers, stormed two government buildings, including the Justice Ministry, across from the presidential palace. More than 20 people were killed and nearly 50 wounded.

In August 2009 – a suicide bomber killed seven people and wounded 90 in an attack outside the headquarters for the NATO-led force, near the U.S. embassy and several government buildings.

In September 2009 - ten Afghan civilians and six Italian soldiers died in a massive suicide car bomb attack on a road between Kabul's airport and the U.S. embassy.

The Haqqani group was responsible for the Indian Embassy bombings in Kabul in 2008 and 2009. Around 70 people, including the Indian defense attaché Brigadier Ravi Datt Mehta and press counsellor Venkateswara Rao, died in the attacks.

In October 2013, Afghan forces intercepted a Haqqani truck in eastern Afghanistan that contained nearly 28 tons of explosives, according to the US National Counterterrorism Center.

In May 2017 - a truck bomb devastated a central area of Kabul near the presidential palace and foreign embassies left 96 people dead.

Haqqani network has kidnapped Afghan officials and Western citizens, for ransom and forcing prisoner exchanges. The network is thought by Western intelligence officials to have been behind the 2008 abduction of American David Rohde, a *New York Times* reporter who managed to escape eight months into his captivity.[10] The Haqqani network is also accused of holding kidnapped US soldier Bowe Bergdahl, released in 2014.

The Haqqani network and Al Qaeda

During the jihad (war) against the Soviet forces in the 1980s, the Haqqani group was the first of the anti-Soviet insurgent groups to welcome foreign Muslim fighters. They included Osama bin Laden and Abdallah Azzam, who trained in a Haqqani-run camp.

According to author Peter Bergen in the book *The Battle for Tora Bora*, the Haqqani Network helped bin Laden to escape Afghanistan when American forces were closing in on him in 2001.[11]

The Haqqani network and al-Qaeda ran joint training camps in Pakistan's North Waziristan region after the U.S. invasion and senior figures of the Haqqani Network "have discussed forming a new joint unit of armed fighters in cooperation with and funded by al-Qaeda."[12]

Taliban officials deny there are any continuing ties with al-Qaeda, although they concede there might be residual sympathies.

The Haqqani network's leadership

After the death of Jalaluddin Haqqani, the founder and the leader of the group, the Haqqani network leadership consisted of the sons of Jalaluddin Haqqani, Sirajuddin Haqqani, the current leader of the network, and Jalaluddin's brothers, Mohammad Ibrahim Omari and Khalil Haqqani.[13]

Jalaluddin Haqqani

A member of the Pashtun Jadran tribe from Afghanistan's Paktia province, Jalaluddin Haqqani was educated in religious schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan. He participated in an unsuccessful Islamist guerrilla campaign against the government of Afghan President Mohammad Daud Khan in 1975.

The Haqqani network originated during the Afghan war between the Mujahideen and the communist regime in Kabul and the Soviet forces (1978 –1989). The founder of the Haqqani network, Jalaluddin Haqqani, rose to prominence as a guerrilla leader in the 1970s and '80s.

The mujahideen received extensive covert support from the US and other countries opposed to the Soviet presence in Afghanistan. Haqqani worked closely with the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and the CIA,

launching attacks and facilitating the flow of fighters and supplies into Afghanistan from Pakistan.

During that conflict and following the Soviet withdrawal, Jalaluddin Haqqani fostered close ties with foreign jihadists including Osama bin Laden.

Following the capture of the Afghan capital, Kabul by the mujahideen in 1992, Haqqani served as minister of justice in the interim cabinet formed by mujahideen leaders.

In 1995 he allied with the Taliban movement, which captured the capital from the mujahideen the following year. Jalaluddin Haqqani pledged allegiance to the Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Omar and allied with the Taliban who took over Afghanistan in 1996.[14]

During the reign of the Taliban government – "Islamic Emirate", Jalaluddin Haqqani was a member of the Leadership Council and Minister of Frontiers serving as a minister until it was toppled by US -led forces in 2001.

Jalaluddin Haqqani is largely credited with introducing suicide bombings as a tactic to the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. Suicide attacks have become a mainstay in tactics employed by the Taliban and its offshoots.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid announced the death of Jalaluddin Haqqani on September 5, 2018. "Al-Haj Mawlawi Jalaluddin Haqqani has passed away after a long battle with illness," the Taliban statement, released by Mujahid, noted.[15]

Sirajuddin Haqqani

Sirajuddin Haqqani became network's chief in 2018 after the death of his father Jalaluddin Haqqani. In 2015 he was appointed deputy leader of the Taliban.

Sirajuddin Haqqani is a specially designated global terrorist, and he is wanted for questioning in connection with the January 2008 attack on a hotel in Kabul, Afghanistan, that killed six people, including an American citizen. He is believed to have coordinated and participated in cross-border attacks against United States and coalition forces in Afghanistan. Sirajuddin Haqqani also allegedly was involved in the planning of the assassination attempt on Afghan President Hamid Karzai in 2008.

Sirajuddin Haqqani has stayed in Pakistan during the years of the war in Afghanistan (2001 – 2021) specifically in the Miram Shah, North Waziristan, Pakistan, area.

Nasiruddin Haqqani

Nasiruddin Haqqani was the son of Jalaluddin Haqqani and the elder brother of Sirajuddin Haqqani, who heads the Haqqani network these days.

Nasiruddin Haqqani was not central to the group's military operations but had a vital role as a fundraiser and emissary who frequently travelled to the Middle East to raise cash. Nasiruddin was the only Haqqani free to exploit his father's vast Middle Eastern contacts and according to some reports, he was in charge to look after his family business there.[16]

From at least 2004 to 2008, Nasiruddin Haqqani collected funds for the Haqqani Network through various fundraising trips. In 2004, Nasiruddin Haqqani traveled to Saudi Arabia with a Taliban associate to raise funds for the Taliban and in 2007 and 2008 he traveled to the United Arab Emirates for fundraising.

In 2004 he also provided funds to militants in Afghanistan for the purpose of disrupting the Afghan presidential election.

As of mid-2007, Nasiruddin Haqqani reportedly had three main sources of funding: donations from the Gulf region, drug trafficking, and payments from Al-Qaeda.

In late 2009, Nasiruddin Haqqani received several hundred thousand dollars from Al-Qaeda-associated individuals in the Arabian Peninsula to use for Haqqani network activities.[17]

He was also the group's main contact person for pro-Taliban elements in Pakistan and he was Islamabad's main link to the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) leadership. He played a prominent role in seeking to bring the anti-Pakistan militant groups in the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) alliance to the dialogue table with Islamabad. Some family members of Nasiruddin Haqqani had been living in the Shahpur area on Islamabad's eastern outskirts.

In November 2013, Nasiruddin was killed in a gun attack at a bread shop in the eastern suburbs of Pakistan's capital, Islamabad.

Khalil Haqqani

Khalil Haqqani is the brother of Jalaluddin Haqqani, the founder and the leader of the group. Khalil Haqqani is a senior member of the Haqqani network, and he was engaged in fundraising activities on behalf of the Taliban and provides support to the Taliban operating in Afghanistan.

Khalil has also acted on behalf of al-Qaeda and has been linked to al-Qaeda terrorist operations. In 2002, he was deploying men to reinforce al-Qaeda elements in Paktia Province, Afghanistan.

In 2009, Khalil was one of several people responsible for the detention of enemy prisoners captured by the Taliban and the Haqqani Network. Khalil has taken orders for Taliban operations from his nephew Sirajuddin Haqqani.

As of early 2010, he provided funds to Taliban cells in Logar Province, Afghanistan.

After the takeover of Kabul by the Taliban, Khalil Haqqani was seen leading prayers in Kabul.

The U.S. Department of the Treasury designated Khalil al-Rahman Haqqani a Specially Designated Global Terrorist under Executive Order 13224 on February 9, 2011.

Yahya Haqqani

Yahya Haqqani is a senior Haqqani network member who has been closely involved in the group's terrorist, financial, and propaganda activities.

In 2012, Yahya coordinated the distribution of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and communications equipment, and he also reviewed preparations for the August 7, 2012, Haqqani network attack against a Coalition Forward Operating Base in Logar Province, Afghanistan, in which thirteen people, including eleven Afghan civilians, were wounded.

Yahya has assumed duties as a Haqqani network logistician and has facilitated funding for Haqqani commanders. In early 2013, he facilitated funding for Haqqani network fighters. Also in early 2013, Yahya coordinated the transfer of supplies from the United Arab Emirates to Haqqani network senior leader Khalil Haqqani.

Yahya sometimes served as a liaison between the Haqqani Network and al-Qaeda, and he has maintained ties with al-Qaeda since at least mid-2009. In this role, Yahya has provided money to al-Qaeda members in the region for their personal expenses.

As of mid-2009, he acted as the Haqqani network's primary liaison with foreign fighters, including Arabs, Uzbeks, and Chechens.

Yahya has also conducted and managed Haqqani network and Taliban media and propaganda activities. As of early 2012, Yahya usually met with Sirajuddin Haqqani to obtain final approval of the Taliban propaganda videos Yahya made. Yahya has worked on Haqqani network media activities since at least 2009 when he edited videos from fighters in Afghanistan working out of a media studio in a Haqqani network madrassa. As of late 2011, Yahya obtained money for Haqqani network media expenses from Sirajuddin Haqqani or one of Sirajuddin's surrogates.

The U.S. Department of the Treasury designated Yahya Haqqani a Specially Designated Global Terrorist under Executive Order 13224 on February 5, 2014. Up to $5 Million Reward.

Anas Haqqani

Anas is the young brother of Sirajuddin. Afghan officials claimed that Anas was a senior member of the insurgency, involved not just in fundraising but also in the execution of the group's strategy.

Anas had been detained on November 12, 2014, as he stopped in Bahrain, while returning from the newly opened Taliban political office in Doha. Rendered to Kabul and kept for nine months at the headquarters of the NDS, the Afghan intelligence service, he was then transferred to Bagram air base. Afghan courts twice passed the death penalty on Anas during his imprisonment. [18]

He was released on November 18, 2019, in a prisoner exchange that included Timothy Weeks, an Australian academic, who'd been taken hostage by the Taliban.

Anas is now back in Kabul. Despite his age, he was one of the Taliban's chief negotiators in intra-Afghan negotiations with the now defunct

government and Anas has held talks with former president Hamid Karzai and ex-chief executive Abdullah Abdullah.

Aziz Haqqani

Aziz Haqqani is a senior member of the Haqqani network and brother to Haqqani network leader Sirajuddin Haqqani. Aziz was intimately involved in logistical operations and command decisions in support of coordinating cross border attacks against International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan forces in Afghanistan. Furthermore, he served as the primary conduit (for the Haqqanis) for operations in Kabul and high-profile attacks throughout the country.

Mohammad Ibrahim Omari

Mohammad Ibrahim Omari is the brother of Jalaluddin Haqqani and Khalil Ahmed Haqqani and the uncle of Sirajuddin Haqqani. Mohammad Ibrahim Omari was listed on February 23, 2001, as Deputy Minister of Frontier Affairs of the Taliban regime so falling within the provisions of resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1333 (2000) of the United Nations Security Council regarding acts and activities of the Taliban authorities.[19]

Summary

Most of the key positions in the interim government presented by the Taliban are staffed by Taliban leaders who also held senior positions in the Taliban regime in 1996-2001, five are former Guantanamo detainees, as well as two senior members of the Haqqani network.

The current composition of the Taliban government should raise concerns in the international community about the extent of the Taliban's commitment to preventing Afghanistan from becoming a center of terror while terrorists appearing on US and UN wanted lists serve as senior government ministers.

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