

Haqqani Network

AT A GLANCE

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HOW TO CITE

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SUMMARY

Formed: Early 1970s

Disbanded: Group is active.

First Attack: July 22, 1975: HN launched an assault against the pro-Daoud governor in the Ziruk district of Pakitka province, Afghanistan (12 killed, 0 wounded).¹

Last Attack: January 27, 2018: More than 100 people were killed when a bomb planted inside of an ambulance exploded near the German Embassy in Kabul. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack, though the United States believes that the attack was carried out by HN militants (more than 100 killed, unknown wounded).²

OVERVIEW

The Haqqani Network (HN) is an insurgent group that operates in the Southeastern region of Afghanistan and the Northwestern Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan. Anti-Soviet fighter Jalaluddin Haqqani founded HN in the early 1970s. Jalaluddin later became the spiritual leader of HN while his son, Sirajuddin Haqqani, took over operational leadership of the group. Since 2001, HN has sought to drive the U.S.-led NATO coalition out of Afghanistan and reestablish Taliban rule in the country. HN's tactics include kidnappings, suicide attacks, and car bombings, and it relies heavily on foreign fighters. HN has also maintained strong links with Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence directorate and Al Qaeda since its formation. U.S.-led coalition drone strikes and targeted assassinations in 2012 and 2013 killed many of the group's senior leaders, limiting its capacity to carry out high profile attack. After high-profile attacks in the summer of 2014, the group has been linked to several attacks in 2017 and 2018 by the Afghan and U.S. government. In January of 2018, the Trump administration suspended military aid to Pakistan pending larger action against HN.

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

The Haqqani Network (HN) is a Sunni Islamic nationalist insurgent group that emerged in the early 1970s in Afghanistan. Jalaluddin Haqqani, a Pashtun tribesman educated at religious schools, began to train militants in North Waziristan, Pakistan, with the ultimate goal of overthrowing Mohammad Daoud Khan, a former Afghani Prime Minister who seized power in a 1973 coup. At the same time, Jalaluddin also served as a senior member of a movement devoted to anti-Daoud and anti-Soviet resistance, Hizb-i-Islami, where he developed ties to militant Islamists in the region.³ HN's first attack occurred in 1975, when Jalaluddin and his fighters launched an assault against the pro-Daoud governor in Ziruk district of Paktika province, Afghanistan. The attack established Haqqani's credentials as a prominent mujahideen commander in the region.⁴ Before Jalaluddin could bring his men back from Pakistan, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) overthrew the Daoud government, and in December 1978, shortly after the coup, the U.S.S.R. invaded Afghanistan.

HN shifted its focus to ousting the Soviet Army and their Afghan allies.⁵ Between 1981 and 1984, while combatting the U.S.S.R., HN increased its territorial control beyond the Zadran tribal areas and ousted a rival family from their leadership role in the region. In 1983, HN retook the cities of Khost and Urgun from the PDPA and the Soviets. The Khost region is particularly important, as it connects routes to both Pakistan and Afghanistan, and so it can be used to control the arms flow in and out of the region.⁶ Like other mujahideen groups, HN received significant support from American, Pakistani, and Saudi intelligence agencies.⁷ In addition to weapons and funding, American officials regularly praised HN leader Jalaluddin for his skill in fighting the Soviets.⁸ Throughout this period, the organization largely maintained an informal structure based on family and tribal ties and other jihadi groups did not recognize HN as a distinct, independent organization until 1994 at the earliest.⁹

Throughout the 1980s, HN played an increasingly important role in the emergence and growth of Al Qaeda (AQ).¹⁰ Jalaluddin supported Osama bin Laden as he formed AQ, allowing bin Laden to construct a cave complex used to train mujahideen volunteers in Haqqani territory and maintaining the new infrastructure there.¹¹ United against the Soviet occupation, AQ and HN continued to grow in size and power, and their relationship continued after the Soviet-Afghan War.¹²

HN also assisted the nascent Afghan Taliban, which emerged in the early 1990s from a network of madrassas in the tribal areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan. HN was an integral actor in enabling the Quetta Shura Taliban's broader organized violence in the north region of Afghanistan. By November 1994 the Taliban was a formidable force, seizing control of Kandahar.¹³ Between 1995 and 1996 Haqqani pledged alliance to the Taliban and supported it when it captured Kabul in 1996.¹⁴ As a reward for HN's support, the Taliban offered Jalaluddin Haqqani a cabinet position as the Minister of Tribal Affairs, a position he held from 1996 through 2001, when the U.S. invaded Afghanistan.¹⁵

After the American invasion and the collapse of the Taliban government in 2001, HN relocated its headquarters to North Waziristan, in Pakistan, and harbored AQ members there.¹⁶ After the

invasion, American and Pakistani officials reportedly met with Jalaluddin to try to persuade him to turn on the Taliban, but he refused.¹⁷ HN began to target U.S. and NATO forces, which pushed HN to the Pakistani border region, where it regrouped to fight against the coalition.¹⁸ U.S. officials have regularly accused Pakistan and their Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI) of harboring and collaborating with HN.

Although their base remained in Pakistan, HN has carried out some of the deadliest attacks in Afghanistan, including an attack against the American Embassy and NATO headquarters in Kabul in September 2011.¹⁹ Six of the HN's leaders have been designated as terrorists since 2008 by the U.S. State Department and the Department of Treasury, and many were killed by drone strikes in 2012 and 2013.²⁰ These drone strikes limited the group's capacity to carry out high profile attacks, and several important Afghan clans that had previously worked with HN reportedly moved toward participation in Afghan politics.²¹ However, Afghan intelligence officials warned that HN could be recovering after several high-profile attacks in the summer of 2014.²² In 2015, the Pakistani government officially outlawed HN.²³

HN remains an active militant threat in Afghanistan. In August 2016, Sirajuddin Haqqani was named deputy to the newly appointed Afghan Taliban leader, Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada.²⁴ The group was linked to several high-profile attacks in 2017, including a car bombing in Kabul that killed over 150 and wounded nearly 500 people. HN denied responsibility but the Afghan government claims the group was responsible. More recently, HN conducted an attack on a Kabul hotel in January of 2018. The Trump administration suspending military aid to the Pakistani government on January 4, 2018 pending stricter military action against the group.²⁵

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A. LEADERSHIP

The structure of the Haqqani Network is largely familial and hierarchical. Many of the group's leaders who aren't related to the Haqqanis by blood graduated from the Dar al-Ulum Haqqaniyaa madrassa in Pakistan, which Jalaluddin attended and which has ties to the Taliban.²⁶

Jalaluddin Haqqani (unknown - present): Jalaluddin is the founder of the Haqqani Network. As he aged, he handed over operational control of HN to his son Sirajuddin and became the group's spiritual leader.²⁷

Sirajuddin Haqqani (unknown - present): Sirajuddin is one of Jalaluddin's sons and the current operational leader of HN who has directed multiple high-profile attacks in Afghanistan.²⁸

Badruddin Haqqani (unknown - 2012): Badruddin was a senior Haqqani Network leader and is thought to have served as the top deputy to his older brother, Sirajuddin. Badruddin was killed in a drone strike in 2012.²⁹

Sangeen Zadran (unknown - 2013): Zadran was the shadow Governor for the Paktika Province, a Haqqani Network commander, and a senior lieutenant to Sirajuddin. He was killed in a drone strike in 2013.³⁰

Nasruddin Haqqani (1980 - 2013): Nasruddin was Sirajuddin's half-brother who led the financing and funding of the Haqqani Network. He was shot dead in Islamabad. The killer was not identified.³¹

Maulvi Ahmad Jan (unknown - 2013): Jan was Sirajuddin's advisor and one of the group's spiritual leaders. He was killed in a drone strike in 2013.³²

Abdul Aziz Ahbasin (unknown - present): Commanded by Sirajuddin Haqqani, Ahbasin serves as the shadow governor in the Taliban-controlled province of Pakita, Afghanistan. He has been responsible for vehicle ambushes and smuggling weapons across the Pakistan-Afghan border. Ahbasin was designated by the UNSC Resolution 1267 Committee on October 4, 2011.³³

Haji Mali Khan (unknown - October 1, 2011): Khan was the senior commander of Haqqani militants in Afghanistan prior to his arrest. He was responsible for planning and facilitating attacks throughout the Southeast provinces. Khan is the uncle of Sirajuddin Haqqani. He was also a highly revered elder in the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas where the Haqqani Network is based. Khan was captured by Coalition forces on October 1, 2011 and was designated as a terrorist on November 1, 2011 by the U.S. State Department.³⁴

Khalil al-Rahman Haqqani (2002 - present): Khalil Haqqani is a major fundraiser in the Persian Gulf for the Haqqani Network. He has also engaged in weapons training and distribution, and organized detention of combatants captured by HN and AQ. He was added to the U.S. State Department's foreign terrorist list, as well as the UN 1267 list, on February 9, 2010.³⁵

B. NAME CHANGES

There are no recorded name changes for this group.

C. SIZE ESTIMATES

- 2012: 2,000 – 4,000 (The National)³⁶
- 2011: 10,000+ (Reuters)³⁷
- 2009: 4,000-12,000 (New York Times)³⁸
- 2004-2010: About 3,000 (Congressional Research Service)³⁹

D. RESOURCES

Due to Jalaluddin Haqqani's wide network in the 1980s, HN is well-funded and well-connected within the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. In the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) of Pakistan, HN has benefitted from the financial support of wealthy individuals, and the majority

of HN funds came from contacts close to Jalaluddin Haqqani himself. However, the group has also drawn support from organizations in the Gulf region, and Jalaluddin's sons have reportedly traveled to the Gulf on multiple occasions to raise support and financial assistance from wealthy sympathizers abroad.⁴⁰

HN has also raised significant portions of its revenue from criminal enterprises such as the illegal sale of chromite and the smuggling of timber, precious jewels, and metals. HN has utilized kidnapping and extortion in some instances, though these activities are not thought to be a significant source of their income.⁴¹

The Taliban and Al Qaeda are reportedly the largest sources of financial and military support for HN. The provision of militia, weapons, training, and finances from both the Taliban and AQ has fueled the continuous growth of HN since the mid-1990s.

HN also received weapons and support from the CIA, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan's ISI during the 1980s struggle against Soviet invasion.⁴² During the Soviet Afghan War, Saudi Arabia's General Intelligence Department, which had close ties to Haqqani, participated in the "dollar for dollar" campaign, in which Saudi Arabia agreed to match all American assistance to the resistance efforts.

E. GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS

Disclaimer: This is a partial list of where the militant organization has bases and where it operates. This does not include information on where the group conducts major attacks or has external influences.

The Haqqani Network operates in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in northern Pakistan, and in southeastern Afghanistan in the Khost, Paktia and Paktika, and North Waziristan region.⁴³ The group's organizational headquarters is reportedly in a town in the FATA called Miram Shah, where it operates base camps in order to facilitate activities such as weapons acquisitions, logistical planning, and military strategy formulation.⁴⁴

HN-controlled regions of northern Pakistan have historically served as safe-havens for other militant organizations, such as Al Qaeda, the Pakistani Taliban, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Lakshar-e-Taiba, and members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. This strategic location of the Haqqani Network facilitates interaction between many of these insurgent groups.

STRATEGY

A. IDEOLOGY AND GOALS

Prior to official formation of HN, Jalaluddin Haqqani was a member of the executive committee of Hizb-i Islami, one of the most radical anti-Soviet anti-Daud resistance movements in the region. HN originally drew its ideology from Hizb-i-Islami and later from the Taliban. HN is also ideologically aligned with Al Qaeda, but unlike Al-Qaeda, HN has a regional rather than a

global focus. It also shares the Al-Qaeda's goal of driving foreign military and influence out of Afghanistan permanently.⁴⁵

HN's underlying goal in the post-2001 Afghan conflict was primarily focused on eradicating Western influence and reestablishing a Taliban rule in Afghanistan.⁴⁶ HN opposes U.S.-led coalition forces, the establishment of new security forces, and the implementation of new democratic institutions.⁴⁷ The role of HN's violence varies, but the purpose is often to enforce obedience over its own population, to terrorize and deter rival groups, and to establish the upper hand in the fight, showing the network's leadership to be strong in times of crisis or a wider civil war.⁴⁸

Since Sirajuddin Haqqani took over the network, HN's ideological goals have shifted to be far more violent and ambitious.⁴⁹ The more recent history of HN suggests that it is no longer solely based on fundamentalist religious ideology or nationalist separatism. Rather, HN's use of power to effect political change in the modern era, whether to capture territory, restore national emirate, or for comparatively less tangible aims, such as helping to create a global Islamic caliphate, is often the result of a complex, pragmatic blending of motives.⁵⁰

B. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

In 1992, Jalaluddin was briefly appointed as the Justice Minister to the Islamic State of Afghanistan. After the U.S. invasion, Jalaluddin was reportedly invited to Islamabad to discuss a post-Taliban government.⁵¹

C. TARGETS AND TACTICS

HN targets Western buildings and organizations, as well as institutions that sympathize with or support foreign officials. Past targets have included the Serena Hotel in Kabul, where the Norwegian Foreign Minister was reportedly meeting at the time of the attack; NATO convoys; the U.S. Embassy; and military bases throughout Afghanistan. On several occasions, HN has hit targets of interest to Pakistan's military, such as the Indian embassy in 2008 and Indian construction companies, fueling allegations of ties between ISI and HN.⁵²

HN is believed to have pioneered the use of suicide bombing in Afghanistan. In addition to mobilizing local members, the group uses foreigners to carry out its attacks.⁵³ For example, HN uses its relationships with Al Qaeda and foreign fighters from Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, and Chechnya to further its tactical goals. These relationships are coordinated primarily by Sirajuddin Haqqani's brother Yahya Haqqani.⁵⁴ Additionally, HN possesses highly advanced technological expertise, particularly related to bomb-making and remote detonation devices.⁵⁵

Since 2001, HN has sought to drive the US-led coalition out of Afghanistan and reestablish Taliban rule in the country. In order to achieve this, HN employs complex, high-profile attacks in the form of suicide bombings, beheadings, vehicle detonations, and kidnappings of Western and Afghan hostages.⁵⁶

HN is largely responsible for the violence in Kabul, and has conducted some of the most notorious attacks against the US-led coalition in Afghanistan. One of HN's most lethal initiatives is its enhanced training program. Led by HN's chief of suicide operations, Abdul Rauf Zakir, fighters from the enhanced training program conducted a 19-hour siege on the US embassy and NATO headquarters in 2011.⁵⁷

Under Sirajuddin Haqqani's leadership, HN has expanded the network's kidnap-for-ransom campaign of wealthy and influential Afghans. Although these local schemes help to support the network financially, HN also seeks more lucrative targets in Western hostages.⁵⁸

MAJOR ATTACKS

Disclaimer: These are some selected major attacks in the militant organization's history. It is not a comprehensive listing but captures some of the most famous attacks or turning points during the campaign.

Throughout the 1980s, HN carried out a continued campaign against the Soviet forces and their Afghan allies in Afghanistan. HN also waged a military campaign against other local families for control in the tribal areas. Specific attacks during this period are not well documented, but it was in this timeframe that Jalaluddin became well-known in the region as a skillful military leader in the fight against the Soviets by commanding his own forces and coordinating with other tribal forces in the area.⁵⁹ After the American invasion, HN began carrying out attacks against U.S. and NATO forces, but attribution of attacks in the early 2000s is difficult.

July 22, 1975: HN launched an assault against the pro-Daoud governor in the Ziruk district of Pakitka province, Afghanistan (12 killed, 0 wounded).⁶⁰

September 10 and 11, 2006: A suicide bomber killed a tribal elder and governor of Paktia Province Abdul Hakim Taniwal, who was also a close friend of President Hamid Karzai. The next day, another suicide bomber attacked Taniwal's funeral, killing five police officers and two children. HN claimed the attack (7 killed, 40+ wounded).⁶¹

January 14, 2008: Four gunmen attacked the Serena Hotel in Kabul, shooting indiscriminately and setting off at least one suicide bomb. At the time, a Norwegian delegation was meeting at the hotel, and was a suspected target of the assault. Afghanistan's intelligence chief implicated Siraj Haqqani in the attack (9 Killed, unknown wounded).⁶²

March 3, 2008: A suicide truck attack killed U.S. soldiers in the Sabri district headquarters in the Khost province. The attack was attributed to HN (2 Killed, unknown wounded).⁶³

April 27, 2008: HN was blamed for the attempted assassination of Hamid Karzai, the Afghani President at the time. Hizb-i-Islami and some senior Afghan defense officials reportedly provided logistical assistance to HN (8 Killed, 11 wounded).⁶⁴

July 7, 2008: An HN car bombing targeted the Indian Embassy in Kabul and killed 54 people. American intelligence officials reportedly found evidence that Pakistan's ISI had provided support in the attack (54 killed, unknown wounded).⁶⁵

May 10, 2010: An attack on a NATO Coalition convoy killed U.S. and Canadian colonels, lieutenant colonels, U.S. soldiers, and Afghan citizens (18 killed, unknown wounded).⁶⁶

September 13, 2011: Insurgents attacked the U.S. Embassy and NATO headquarters in Kabul and laid siege to the bases for nineteen hours, killing five police officers and eleven civilians (16 killed, 100+ wounded).⁶⁷

October 29, 2011: The Taliban claimed a car bomb attack in West Beirut, but Afghan and American officials suspect that HN carried out the attack (5 killed, 77 wounded).⁶⁸

June 22, 2012: Militants carried out a 12-hour siege of a popular hotel in Kabul. Afghan Special Police, backed by NATO forces, ended the siege. NATO Commanders claimed that HN was responsible for the attack (20 killed, unknown wounded).⁶⁹

July 15, 2014: Experts claim that HN was responsible for a truck bomb attack in a market located in a remote eastern district in Afghanistan (72 killed, unknown wounded).⁷⁰

July 17, 2014: A suicide attacker fired grenades on the Kabul Airport. The attacker is believed to belong to HN (5 killed, 0 wounded).⁷¹

June 22, 2015: A car bomb exploded outside of the Afghan parliament building, and gunmen shot into the crowd. The Taliban claimed responsibility, but Afghan intelligence blamed HN and alleged that the attack was funded by Pakistan's ISI, which Pakistan denied (5 killed, 30+ wounded).⁷²

May 31, 2017: More than 150 people were killed when a truck bomb went off in Kabul. Afghan officials believed that HN was responsible for the attack (150+ killed, unknown wounded).⁷³

June 6, 2017: A truck bomb exploded in a diplomatic zone in central Kabul. The attack was one of the deadliest attacks in Afghanistan in recent history. Afghan intelligence attributed the attack to HN, despite the fact that the group specifically denied responsibility (about 90 killed, unknown wounded).⁷⁴

January 20, 2018: Six militants attacked a hotel in Kabul. The Taliban claimed responsibility and the attackers were believed to belong to HN (22 killed, 6 wounded).⁷⁵

January 27, 2018: More than 100 people were killed when a bomb planted inside of an ambulance exploded near the German Embassy in Kabul. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack, though the United States believes that the attack was carried out by HN militants (100+ killed, unknown wounded).⁷⁶

INTERACTIONS

A. DESIGNATED/LISTED

- September 7, 2012: The U.S. Secretary of State designated the Haqqani Network as a Foreign Terrorist Organization.⁷⁷

B. COMMUNITY RELATIONS

The Haqqani Network is closely tied to the local tribes in the FATA region in Pakistan. HN frequently provides financial compensation to locals willing to help support, protect, and provide for HN operatives or operations. This allows HN to draw upon a large population of fighters for their operations.

HN's successful integration into the local political landscape of Islamist militancy across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border is not a new phenomenon. Since the 1970s, HN has depended on an intricate network of jihadist supporters and tribal solidarity to wage violent campaigns across the region. However, through the methodical absorption of key qawm leaders, from the village elders, khans, and mullahs, to the senior militia commanders of hardline Islamist groups across conflict zones, HN has set itself apart in the region. HN has significant operational reach, and has demonstrated ambition and ability to project influence, employ violence to achieve political ends, and broaden its network well beyond its traditional community in southeastern Afghanistan.⁷⁸

In many cases, HN has reconstituted beyond its traditional safe havens in Pakistan and Afghanistan by relying on indirect forms of control. HN does this in order to evade detection and sabotage by the West, while organizing violence well beyond its traditional tribal and ethnic strongholds.⁷⁹

Given HN's familial structure, the inner command circle is not open to fighters and leaders who do not belong to the Haqqani family or Zadran tribe.⁸⁰

C. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS

Between 1995 and 1996, Haqqani pledged alliance to the Taliban and supported the group when it captured Kabul in 1996.⁸¹ As a reward for HN's support, the Taliban offered Jalaluddin Haqqani a cabinet position as the Minister of Tribal Affairs, a position he held from 1996 through 2001, when the U.S. invaded Afghanistan.⁸²

In addition, relations with Al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan date back to the early 1990s, when AQ was just starting to form.⁸³ AQ and HN continued to grow in size and power, and their relationship continued after the Soviet-Afghan War.⁸⁴

HN has also been tied to operations with Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), a militant group reportedly nurtured and funded by the ISI. Though direct links between these two groups are not known, it

is suspected that the ISI utilizes both groups to carry out terror operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁸⁵ It is also suspected that Al Qaeda and the ISI utilize Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) as a proxy for carrying out attacks alongside HN's forces.

D. STATE SPONSORS AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

HN established its jihadist credentials in the 1980s during the Afghan War against the Soviets as a mujahedeen organization.⁸⁶ The network rose to power in large part through the backing of Pakistan, which allegedly supports Islamist militants in Afghanistan in order to create strategic depth.⁸⁷ Since the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan, it has been alleged that Pakistan quietly supports HN and other allied militant proxies to both hasten the departure of Western forces and influence a post-NATO Afghanistan that supports Pakistani interests.⁸⁸

In September 2011, the U.S.'s top military official, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen, publicly accused Pakistan's ISI of playing a direct role in supporting HN in its attack on the American Embassy and International Security Assistance Forces Headquarters in Kabul. At the time, these targets were two of the most prominent symbols of American diplomatic and military presence in Afghanistan.⁸⁹

In 2015, the Pakistani government ostensibly outlawed HN.⁹⁰ However, according to Western and Afghan intelligence officials, Islamabad has shown no sign that it is genuinely willing to end its alleged support for HN.⁹¹

Because of HN's close relationship with certain Islamist militant factions (Al Qaeda, the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, Lashkar-e-Taiba) and state actors (allegedly, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia), HN employs a policy of "organizational ambiguity" to ensure that the link between foreign sponsors and HN operations is kept from public view.⁹²

When HN attacks are linked to state-facilitated violence, the West has, in select cases obtained enhanced legal authorities to apply military, financial, and diplomatic pressure on both HN and its backers. For this reason, the U.S. State Department designated HN as a foreign terrorist organization following its 2011 attack on the U.S. Embassy in Kabul. Washington's subsequent accusations of HN's direct links to the ISI have further beleaguered Western relations with Islamabad.⁹³

MAPS

- Global Al Qaeda
- Pakistan

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