

Role of the Haqqani Network in the Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan: An Analysis

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Abstract: Haqqani Network is a well-known insurgent group active in Afghanistan and Pakistan. It is often described as the strongest, the deadliest and the most influential group in the overall Taliban insurgency. Throughout several decades, the group has committed violence, organised suicide attacks, assassinations, and kidnappings, with a preponderance of the Afghan security forces, government officials, and foreign organisations. By doing so, the Haqqani Network has complemented the Taliban military and ideological war against the Afghan government and the foreign forces. The Haqqani Network enjoys strong patronage of the Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and the Pakistani army. They provided safe havens, logistical support and strategic advice to the group in the Pakistan's North Waziristan. The network holds its strongholds in the southeast parts of Afghanistan where there are provinces like Khost, Paktia and Paktika which are used as the bases of operations by the network. The major agenda of the Haqqani Network is to create an Islamic State in Afghanistan, whereby a strict understanding of Islamic Sharia Law would be imposed. Considering similarities between this desire and the desire of the Afghan Taliban, the Haqqani Network has always been ideologically and militarily in support of the Taliban. The two groups are also interconnected, carry out activities in coordination of operations, and they support and strengthen the influence of each other in Afghanistan. Since the Taliban came to rule again in 2021, the Haqqani Network has gained substantial power in the new Taliban-led regime. The individuals who were key players in the network now hold senior offices, further establishing the network as a pillar of the Taliban's governing and security system.



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Introduction

The Haqqani Network has traditionally been based in Khost, Paktia and Paktika provinces in the southeast of Afghanistan. In these areas, they take advantage of the already established tribal connections with the Pashtun groups along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. It helps them to provide much-needed human resources, supply chains, and safe harbour (EFSAS, 2022). At the

same time, the organisation has had a long working relationship with the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and the Pakistani military establishment, that have added to its operational capability (Weinbaum & Babbar 2016; EFSAS 2022). The network shares an ideological affinity with the Taliban in its grand ambition to create an Islamic Emirate with strict adherence to the Sharia law, as well as exhibits a transnational jihadist tendency and continues to have interconnections with al-Qaida, Lashkar-e-Taiba and other militant groups (Giustozzi 2019). The Haqqani Network funds its activities by raising revenue through illegal activities, such as drug trafficking, extortion, and smuggling, along with contributions made by supporters in the Gulf (Rutting 2009). It is worth noting that Sirajuddin Haqqani- who is the Minister of Interior- analysed how far the group has now become part and parcel of the Taliban government machinery. Such a complex convergence of tribal politics, regional geopolitics and extremist ideology is therefore illustrated in the evolving path of the Haqqani Network, which has developed from a guerrilla militia to a state actor. Network's further relevance brings to the fore essential issues relating to the internal stability of Afghanistan and its future relations with its neighbours and the international community at large.

It is commonly accepted that the Haqqani Network is a hybrid entity as it conducts both political and criminal operations at the intersection of insurgency, organised crime, and regional geopolitics (Peters 2012: 2). It is commonly cited as one of the most violent and strategically important groups in the wider Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan. Prominent suicide bombings, assassinations of high-ranking officials, and kidnappings form its armoury, many times aimed at destabilising the government of Afghanistan and foreign troops in the region (Dressler 2012).

Origin of the Haqqani Network

The origin of the Network date back to the Cold War, the Afghan-Soviet war of 1979. One of the most prominent commanders of mujahedin was Jalaluddin Haqqani, the leader of the Zadran tribe, who gained fame with the most aggressive attacks against Soviet troops and became one of the most popular beneficiaries of the CIA Operation Cyclone, a CIA-supported program providing major financial and military aid (Giustozzi 2019). This assistance allowed Jalaluddin Haqqani to develop networks of affiliation with Osama bin Laden, and to create transnational networks of affiliation. As Soviet troops were pulled out of Afghanistan and a long civil war between mujahideen factions ensued, the Taliban toppled the warring groups and seized power in Kabul in 1996. Jalaluddin Haqqani brought his network in line with Taliban authorities and, following the formation of Taliban regime, he was made Minister of Tribal and Border Affairs, the role he retained until the U.S.-led invasion in 2001 (Kaura 2021). The formal alliance saw the Haqqani Network become part of Taliban politics and the military, but with the network retaining significant operational freedom.

The two-fold role of the Haqqani Network as a subordinate group of the Taliban and as an autonomous power broker allowed it to exert its influence in the southeastern part of Afghanistan and northwestern Pakistan. It enjoyed impunity in the tribal belt, particularly in North Waziristan, supposedly under the auspices of the Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency (Weinbaum & Babbar 2016). At the same time, income in the form of smuggling, extortion, and drug trafficking has given it a solid economic foundation and operational capacity.

The Haqqani Network is still a pillar of Taliban rule in present times. Jalaluddin had a son, Sirajuddin Haqqani, who is currently the Minister of Interior in the Taliban de facto government, in charge of internal security and law enforcement. His appointment marks the shift of the group to statecraft, and it also creates some severe issues about the direction of Afghanistan under the Taliban reign (Dressler 2012; Giustozzi 2019).

Traditionally, the Haqqani Network has been one of the strongest and militant groups of the larger Taliban insurgency. The Network was formed in 1996 under Jalaluddin Haqqani, who led the

previous group, the mujahideen forces that fought the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s. In that regard, Jalaluddin enjoyed massive logistical and diplomatic assistance from the Central Intelligence Agency and Saudi intelligence, and thus became a major participant in the Cold War clash of Islamic forces. The departure of the Soviet troops in 1989 and the ensuing civil war in Afghanistan motivated Jalaluddin to join the Taliban, whose ascent to political power in 1996 was eventually decisive. After doing so, he was named Minister of Tribal and Border Affairs, and the Haqqani Network was then incorporated into the Taliban political and military leadership, but with much of its operational independence, including its own chain of command and financial network, remaining intact.

The main bases of operation of the Network are geographically located in North Waziristan in Pakistan, and in particular in Miram Shah, the central town of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). This mountainous region, with poor state control and a well-developed system of tribal relations, was traditionally a safe haven for militant groups. Under such circumstances, the Haqqani Network acts with relative impunity in the highly established Pashtun social structures (Lurie 2020). Doctrinally, the Network is broadly referred to as a Sunni Islamist group that is dedicated to the creation of an Islamic Emirate that is to be guided by stringent Shariah law codes. The Miramshah Shura is a decision-making body with strategic and operational control, composed of members of the Haqqani family and operates both as the political and military arm of the network as well as coordinates operations in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. In 2015, Sirajuddin Haqqani took over the leadership of the Miramshah Shura after his father retired, a move that cemented the status of the Network within the broader Taliban structure and strengthened the relationship with transnational jihadist groupings like al-Qaeda and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and allowed collaboration, exchanging intelligence as well as doctrinal alignment among the affiliate organisations (Kaura 2021). The development of the Haqqani Network, which has gone through the phases of guerrilla organisation to become a major constituent component of Taliban rule, proves its strategic relevance, whereas its present prominence in the so-called Taliban 2.0 poses serious concerns regarding regional stability and effectiveness of the current counter-terrorism policies.

Ideology of the Haqqani Network

The Haqqani Network is a clan-based rebel group with a deeply rooted hierarchical structure that is deep in the socio-political and militant fibre of both Afghanistan and Pakistan. The power structure in the network is in the hands of the members of the Haqqani family; however, some of the powerful members are not part of this direct lineage. A large percentage of these actors are graduates of the Dar-ul-Uloom Haqqaniyaa Madrassa in Akora Khattak, Pakistan, which has been branded as ideologically aligned with the Taliban and as being the source of generations of jihadist leadership (Lurie 2020). Dar-ul-Uloom Haqqaniyaa has remained a centre of radical Sunni Islamist ideas and has had a formative impact on the Haqqani Network intellectually.

Jalaluddin Haqqani, founder of the network, was initially interested in becoming an Islamic teacher; he attended Dar-ul-Uloom Haqqaniyaa before he turned to a militant path. During the years leading to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Haqqani moved to Miram Shah, North Waziristan, where he was trained militarily as well as gaining the strategic backing of Pakistani intelligence services to undermine the pro-Soviet regime of Mohammad Daoud Khan. Through this transition, from a scholar to a fighter, he therefore became the originator of one of the deadliest insurgent groups in South Asia.

Jalaluddin Haqqani gained recognition as a very successful mujahideen commander in the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989) who held the respect of all factions due to his tactical skills and battlefield courage. These diplomatic ties with the Sunni Gulf states brought with them significant financial resources, and his role in resolving conflicts between opposing militant organisations along the Afghan-Pakistan border further enhanced his status as a uniting factor in the jihadist

world. The key moment came when he worked closely with Osama bin Laden in the 1990s, which helped bin Laden move to Pakistan following the 2001 United States invasion of Afghanistan (Kaura 2021). Jalaluddin Haqqani had control over the Haqqani Network until he was incapacitated by illness. His death was announced officially by the Taliban on 4 September 2018. Sirajuddin Haqqani took over the leadership of the group on behalf of his father and later became the key motor of network activities. Sirajuddin is also in charge of the organisation of many high-profile attacks, such as suicide bombings and improvised-explosive-device campaigns against the Afghan and coalition forces. He was also involved in the assassination attempt of the former Afghan President Hamid Karzai in 2008 and was listed as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist by the U.S. Department of State in 2008 (Lurie 2020; Dressler 2012).

Under the leadership of Sirajuddin Haqqani, the Haqqani Network has expanded its scope of operations to a considerable degree and enhanced its relations with other transnational jihadist groups, especially al-Qaeda and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). One of the main orchestrators of such ties is Yahya Haqqani, the brother-in-law of the network and the senior liaison of the network with al-Qaeda. Yahya organises the transfer of finances, arranges propaganda, and oversees collective terrorism acts. In 2014, the U.S. Department of the Treasury named him also as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist, thus emphasising his operational importance to the Haqqani infrastructure (Lurie 2020).

Sirajuddin has another senior person, Aziz Haqqani, his brother, who plays a central role in organisational decision-making and logistics. He has played a prominent role in the coordination of cross-border raids against the Afghan government and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). It has been reported that under Aziz Haqqani, alias Hafiz Azizuddin, there has been a joint force of 2,000 members that operate mainly in eastern Afghanistan and conduct coordinated attacks as well as maintain supply chains across porous borders in the region (Lurie 2020).

The organisational structure of the network is very compact, and familial loyalty forms the core of its leadership. Its main commanding body, the Miramshah Shura, is controlled by the members and associates of the Haqqani family, and serves both as the political and military command structure of the network, developing strategy and managing alliances with other jihadist groups. This clan-based leadership model is widely credited with the ability of the organisation to maintain cohesion and operational efficiency despite external forces (Dressler 2012).

Over the past few years, the Haqqani Network has evolved into an overt insurgent group that has become a core element of the Taliban governing infrastructure. Sirajuddin Haqqani has taken charge in the de facto Taliban government as Acting Minister of Interior, in charge of internal security and law enforcement. This appointment indicates not only the growing power of the network but also its official establishment within the state system, which raises the question of its future management and counterterrorism in Afghanistan to a great extent (Kaura 2021).

Finance of the Haqqani Network

At the initial phase, the Haqqani Network came into existence through the safe havens in Pakistan and through the patronisation of the elements of the Pakistani state. In the 1990s, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan provided weapons, money and operational advice that enabled the group to wage war against the government of Afghanistan as well as foreign armies (Dressler 2010). The founder of the network is Jalaluddin Haqqani, who also established strong ties with the wealthy Arab donors, especially in the Gulf. In Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, he regularly travelled to seek funds to finance jihadist operations, using his reputation as a respected mujahideen leader of the Soviet-Afghan war days (Peters 2012: 14).

Financial architecture of the Haqqani Network is confusing, as it relies on both like-minded groups and illegal businesses. The sponsors are the ISI, al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban, all of

which have strategic and ideological interests with the network. Besides the external contributions, the group has also established an internal revenue system, which includes smuggling, extortion, and kidnapping to pay ransom. Such activities are regularly synchronised with other radical groups acting on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border (Lurie 2020).

Financial operations of the network could be split into a number of streams:

- **Export Businesses:** The Haqqani Network owns speciality export companies in the southeast of Afghanistan and the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan, dealing in timber, gemstones and precious metals.
- **Kidnapping Ransom:** This has continued to be a profitable source of income and has often been carried out in conjunction with other jihadist groups.
- **Smuggling and illegal Taxation:** The group collects illegal taxes in the local communities and crosses porous borders with commodities, which include narcotics and weapons.
- **Real Estate Holdings:** The network possesses urban-based commercial and residential real estate that provides revenue in the form of rent and enables logistics.
- **Construction and Transport Companies:** These companies are usually registered off companies and are utilised to launder money as well as the movement of staff and supplies.
- **Ideological Donations:** Gulf and Pakistan sympathisers who are wealthy donate funds to the network, which they see as a legitimate Islamic resistance movement.
- **Money Laundering:** Funds are diverted and passed through informal hawala systems and shell companies to hide the incoming and outgoing of money.

These monetary processes keep the Haqqani Networks' military, political and ideological operations going, and they enable the organisation to operate as both an insurgent group and a quasi-political outfit in the Taliban government.

Role of the Haqqani Network in the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan

The Haqqani Network has been considered for a long time as one of the strongest and most strategically important groups of the Taliban insurgency. Its fidelity to the Taliban leadership is well-documented, and its infiltration into the Taliban military and political structure has been developing over a few decades. Although some scholars believe that the Haqqani Network acts on its own, others have stressed that the group is crucial in supporting the Taliban insurgency, especially in the eastern part of Afghanistan. This mountainous region, Loya Paktia, has been a powerhouse of Haqqani activities, and much of the attacks conducted by the network were later reported in the name of the Taliban, thus indicating their strategic dependence on each other (Weinbaum & Babbar 2016).

U.S. attempts to break the relationship between the Haqqani Network and the Taliban have been on a continuous losing trend. In 2011, the son of Jalaluddin Haqqani, Sirajuddin Haqqani, who currently heads the network, openly pledged his allegiance to the Quetta Shura of the Taliban and said that his network would support whatever decision his Quetta Shura members propose regarding the future of Afghanistan (Weinbaum & Babbar 2016). The Haqqani Network has played an influential role in Taliban leadership and military operations, and when Taliban founder Mullah Omar died in 2015, Sirajuddin Haqqani was named deputy emir of the Taliban.

The Haqqani Network is viewed as the most armed group within the Taliban in terms of military capability. It commands major security activities in Afghanistan, including Kabul, and maintains the elite special forces teams and military bases. Sirajuddin Haqqani is currently the Interior Minister of the post-2021 Taliban government, and the network has taken its key positions in control of intelligence services, issuance of passports and migration (EUAA 2023). By May 2022,

the Haqqani Network was said to be the group in the Taliban with the strongest ties to al-Qaeda, causing great concern related to the security of the region and the whole world (Ram 2022: 151).

The partnership between the Haqqani network and al-Qaeda is old and rooted. This relation has made it easier to conduct joint operations, ideological partnership, logistics and training support. Considering the fact that the Haqqani Network controls the Interior Ministry of Afghanistan, its closeness to al-Qaeda is a great threat to regional security and combating terrorism. Concerns have been raised repeatedly by the U.S. and its allies about this nexus, particularly after the history of high-profile attacks by the Haqqani Network and its service as a host to al-Qaeda operatives (Dressler 2012; Doucet 2022). Close attention has been given to the support of Pakistan for the Haqqani Network. The network has been able to find safe havens in Pakistan in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), especially North Waziristan. The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan has given the Haqqani Network money, weapons, and strategic direction to fuel the Haqqani Network to extend its reach in southeastern Afghanistan and carry out cross-border attacks with impunity (CRS Report 2021; Weinbaum & Babbar 2016).

In the 1990s, the Haqqani Network enjoyed a tactical partnership with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Jalaluddin Haqqani, Baitullah Mehsud and Hakimullah Mehsud fought alongside each other in the war against the Soviets in the Somali plains north of Kabul. Likewise, Jalaluddin Haqqani is claimed to have ordered Baitullah Mehsud, who became the leader of TTP in the future. As a result, cadres and ideological materials moved freely. Such dual loyalty leaves the Haqqani Network in an awkward situation: an asset to the Pakistani state as an effective proxy force and yet still under the protection of the Pakistani military at a time when it is closely allied to an organisation that is considered to be an enemy of Pakistan (Weinbaum & Babbar 2016: 6).

From the Pakistani point of view, the strategic utility of the Haqqani Network is that it allows an influence in Afghanistan to be executed as a proxy force. The network has been recruited by the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) to advance geopolitical agendas, especially in the planning of attacks on Indian interests. The most notable one is the bombing of the Indian Embassy in Kabul in 2008 that killed 54 people; the attack was attributed to the Haqqani Network and was proven to be conducted with the help of ISI (Dressler 2012; Weinbaum & Babbar 2016). Heightened external action has also exposed Haqqani influence in the south-eastern regions of Afghanistan (Weinbaum & Babbar 2016).

Poor American-Pakistani relations are often explained by the perceived synergy of the Haqqani Network with some sections of the ISI. The American leadership has consistently asked Pakistan to crack the network, but Islamabad has taken a number of positions: denying any direct connections or even stating that crippling the Haqqani Network would push it into the hands of other anti-Pakistan groups like the TTP. Admiral Michael Mullen, who was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 2011, described the Haqqani Network as a veritable arm of ISI, but the US did not resort directly to military options due to military compulsions against Pakistan (Weinbaum & Babbar 2016). In 2012, the Haqqani Network was finally recognised by the U.S. State Department as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation.

The Council on Foreign Relations also singles out the Haqqani Network as a key provider of insurgency infrastructure on the Afghan-Pakistan border. The group links the Taliban, the Pakistani intelligence, al-Qaeda and other jihadist factors. Even though the Haqqani Network shares ideology and strategy with the Taliban, it maintains operational independence, is based in tribal areas in Pakistan, and uses those safe havens to attack provinces in Afghanistan, including Khost, Paktika and Paktia, and sometimes even within the suburbs of Kabul itself (Waldman 2010: 1617; Dressler 2012).

Late in August 2016, thousands of Taliban members under the leadership of Haqqani commanders made a large-scale attack in Paktia province, which testifies to the strength of the militant forces,

as well as their strategic location (Raul 2016). Sirajuddin Haqqani has been linked to many fatal events, such as the 2017 deadly Kabul truck bomb attack, which killed over 150 civilians, and the 2008 bombing of the Serena Hotel in Kabul that led to the death of six people, including an American citizen. The fact that he was involved in launching cross-border strikes against the United States and its allies and the assassination of former Afghan President Hamid Karzai in 2008 makes him one of the key perpetrators of Taliban violence (Doucet 2022).

On 12 September 2011, the Haqqani Network was the group that carried out an attack on the U.S. Embassy and NATO compounds in Kabul and killed eight people, four of whom were police officers and four civilians. Throughout the two-decade war in Afghanistan, the group consistently conducted major attacks targeting U.S. troops and the Afghan government and has received recognition as the most dangerous insurgent group (Smith 2021).

After the death of Jalaluddin Haqqani, Sirajuddin took complete control of the network. During his reign, activities gained momentum and the organisation increased its presence in the Taliban governance system. The Haqqani Network has also been seen as more influential than the Islamic State in Afghanistan, and its capacity to operate remains a big threat to regional stability (Ram 2022: 125-126). Coupled with the security situation is the fact that there is an alignment with international jihadist movements like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. The Biden administration had raised many alarms about the revival of these organisations, especially after the Haqqani Network extended support to their operations (Smith 2021). The ideological affiliation of this group to global jihad and its operational integration with transnational terrorist groups were the reasons why the group was attracting counterterrorism attention.

The Taliban movement is largely Pashtun in its composition, but the Haqqani Network is a distinguishable group. The historically traditional Taliban leadership represented by Mullah Omar, Mullah Yaqoob, and Mullah Baradar is based out of the city of Kandahar in southern Afghanistan, or the Haqqani, which is an insular base, lying largely within the Zadran tribe based in northeastern Afghanistan specifically in the mountainous areas bordering Pakistan. This tribal and geographic disjunction has allowed the network to secure a semi-autonomous status in the Taliban chain of command (Smith 2021).

Existing literature highlights how the Haqqani Network was a major component of the Taliban rebellion, its strategic alliance with the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan, and the alignment between its operations and al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups. The transformation of the Network into a governing arm of the Taliban regime shows how ideology, affiliation to a specific tribe, and geopolitical policy have interacted. The Haqqani Network is an influential stakeholder whose influence reverberates into the extent of Middle East and global security due to its role in the transitional region of post-conflict politics in Afghanistan.

In addition, the rise of the network in the Taliban movement is to be seen not only because of their capabilities in the field of battle but also because of the strategic flexibility and ideological versatility of the network. Although the Taliban has always aimed to create an Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan, the Haqqani Network has more of a transnational jihadist character, thus acting as the bridge between local guerrilla and international terrorism with the help of such organisations as al-Qaeda, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

The success of the Haqqani Network is explained by its ability to integrate well into the local tribal systems and also to use the local grievances. The Haqqani family is based in the Zadran tribe and has a large following in the southeast of Afghanistan and adjacent northwestern Pakistan. This tribal association makes recruitment easy, provides safe zones, and offers cross-border logistics. The ability of the organisation to mediate internal conflicts between jihadist groups expands its power beyond tribal borders. With the fall of Kabul in August 2021, the Haqqani Network got entrenched in the Taliban system of governance. By naming Sirajuddin

Haqqani as Interior Minister, the network is placed at the heart of the domestic security, law enforcement, and intelligence services. This centralisation increases its capacity to control policy agendas, surveillance of access to government resources, and influence other Taliban constituencies. According to observers, because of the de facto rule of Kabul by the security apparatus, the Haqqani Network becomes the most powerful component of the Taliban regime.

The increased interest of international observers is due to the potential of the revived terrorism threats, as the Haqqani Network is close to al-Qaeda and dominates the Afghan national security machinery. In 2023, the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) stated that Haqqani Network affiliates keep the closest operational links with al-Qaeda of any Taliban affiliate, a matter of concern to counterterrorism agencies across the world.

The other pillar of Haqqani's strength is financial stability. In addition to external financing and ISI sponsorship, the network earns money through extortion, smuggling, ransom and kidnapping as well as through legitimate business activities. With these funds, the organisation funds its activities and pays salaries to fighters which increases the strength of the network. According to Peters (2012), the financial savviness of the Haqqani Network competes with the likes of organised crime syndicates, which makes it one of the most economically powerful insurgencies in the region.

Overall, the Haqqani Network's development from a tribal militia to a pillar of the Taliban government demonstrates its effectiveness and flexibility in terms of strategy. Its close links with Pakistan intelligence bodies, ideological compatibility with transnational jihadist networks, and control over the Afghanistan security apparatus make the network a key player in defining the political, military, and ideological future of Afghanistan under Taliban rule.

The Haqqani and Taliban 2.0 government in Afghanistan

After a long history of insurgency against outside powers and the Afghan Republic, the Taliban retook power in August 2021, which led to the collapse of the pro-Western democratic order and the establishment of Taliban 2.0. The most significant decision in the subsequent government was the appointment of Sirajuddin Haqqani, leader of the Haqqani Network, to the key post of Interior Minister. A fugitive with an FBI wanted poster and a defendant in a case related to multiple attacks on U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan (Doucet 2022), Sirajuddin Haqqani, being placed in a cabinet-level position, highlights the scope of the network of Haqqani Network members within Taliban leadership.

The United States and the United Nations have identified and continue to identify about 50 per cent of the Taliban cabinet as involved in terrorist acts. The U.S. Department of State provides a reward of U.S. \$10 million in case of any information that will help to arrest Sirajuddin Haqqani in regard to his suspected leadership of deadly attacks and his sustenance of connections with the international jihadist networks (CRS Report 2022). However, even after such designations, the Haqqani Network still holds a few of the most important ministries, namely, intelligence, migration and internal security, which shows that it is deeply incorporated into the Taliban government.

The official proclamation of Taliban 2.0 in September 2021 was not only the triumph of the Afghan Taliban but also a milestone in the course of the Haqqani Network. Its commanders were given various ministerial portfolios, giving the group more influence. However, some internal tensions were observed: according to reports, senior Haqqani officials challenged the Afghan Taliban leadership, and a number of major commanders left Kabul and returned to the traditional sanctuaries in southern Afghanistan (Smith 2021). These occurrences uncovered dormant competitions and the complex power structure between the two institutions.

In spite of its extensive depiction as an independent unit of the Taliban, the Haqqani Network upholds separate command and operation philosophies. According to a 2010 intelligence assessment by the U.S., Sirajuddin Haqqani is said to have made independent targeting choices in collaboration with the supreme Taliban leadership (Smith 2021). This gives the Haqqani Network the freedom of operation to follow objectives that do not necessarily align with the larger Taliban movement.

Sirajuddin Haqqani has been a deputy leader of the Taliban since 2015 due to which influence of the Network gets increased. His leadership has made the Afghan Taliban and Al-Qaeda coordinate closely. The Haqqani Network is also known to be a key facilitator of Al-Qaeda activities in Afghanistan, as the United Nations sanctions monitors identified that the assassination of Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in July 2022 took place at a Kabul safe house suspected to be run by the Network

The Haqqani Network has overcome legal obstacles and increased political influence by getting integrated into Taliban governance and has been able to diversify its operations. According to a United Nations sanctions monitor's report in June 2023, there is growing involvement of the Network in the manufacture and trafficking of methamphetamine and other synthetic drugs to give it a criminal revenue stream in addition to insurgent activities (CRS Report 2024). This growth pattern shows the flexibility of the organisation in the unstable post-conflict environment in Afghanistan.

Overall, the rise of the Haqqani Network in Taliban 2.0 reflects the transition of the group to a central figure in government. Its control of key ministries, relations with terror groups, and its incursions into illegal economies present major threats to the stability of the region and the international counter-terror construct. The Haqqani Network will continue to be one of the critical concerns of security analysts and policymakers as Afghanistan enters a post-conflict path.

Conclusion

The Haqqani Network is part of the most well-organised and militarily strong-armed groups in Afghanistan. Their long-term operational capability has enabled it to perpetrate many high-profile attacks against Coalition forces that has contributed significantly to the Taliban resurgence and the consequent establishment of political power in 2021. Although the Haqqani Network and the Taliban are widely regarded as separate organisations, the two organisations overlap in terms of their ideological background in Deobandi Islam and the common goal of implementing an Islamic Emirate under a strict interpretation of the Sharia. In addition to ideological sustenance, the Haqqani Network has provided the Taliban with the much-needed logistical, tactical and administrative support, especially when the Taliban was engaged in fighting and counter-surveillance activities. After Taliban takeover in 2021, the Haqqani leaders became senior ministers in the Taliban government further strengthening the merging of the two entities. Coordination between the Haqqani command and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and other Pakistani security authorities is historically evident, and the external observers typically attribute it to the situation in which Pakistan attempts to offset Indian regional influence and to ensure indirect control over the processes in Afghanistan. The absorption of the Haqqani Network into the Taliban government thus adds to the immediate strength of the coalition in Afghanistan and increases the danger of regional destabilisation by the establishment of a powerful destabilisation constituency, the exacerbation of tensions with India and other states and the difficulty of international efforts to implement counter-terrorism goals and to achieve long-term peace.

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